OPINION: BETTER GLOBAL GOVERNANCE P.24 | FEATURES: WORLD INTERNET CONFERENCE P.34

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GAMES FOR GOOD

Sport has become a new driving force for development

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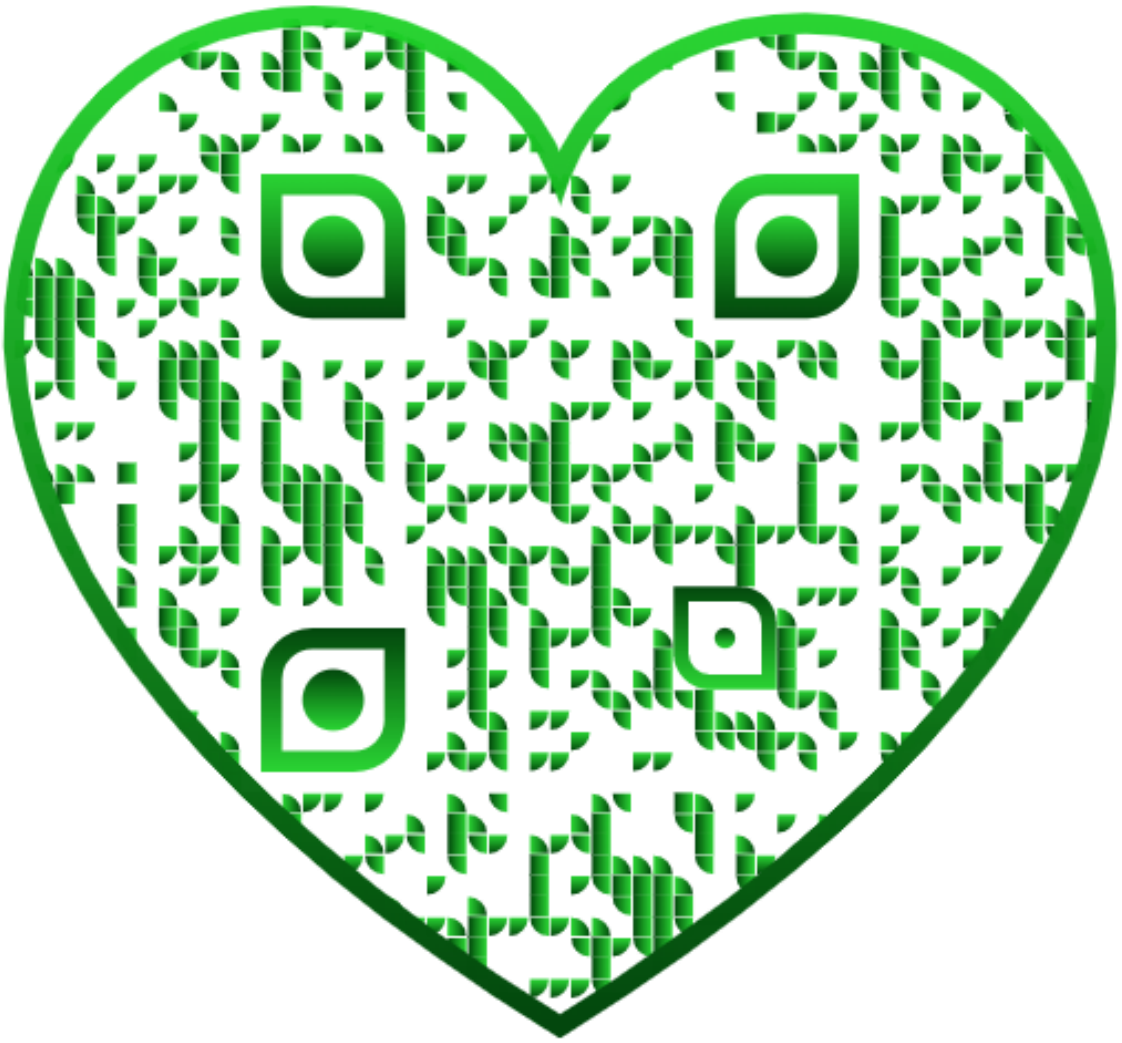

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Cover Photo: The opening ceremony of the 15th National Games in Guangzhou, Guangdong Province, on November 9 (VCG)

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National Games for Greater Integration

The National Games, China's premier multi-sport event, opened in Guangzhou, Guangdong Province, on November 9. This year's 15th edition of the games is the first to be co-hosted by the country's two special administrative regions, with Guangdong Province sharing its hosting responsibilities with neighboring Hong Kong and Macao.

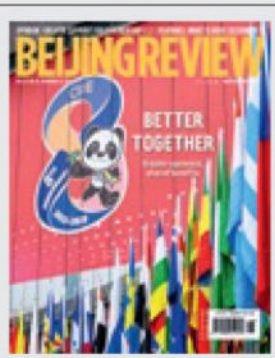
This year's games are a landmark project in the development of the Greater Bay Area, a national initiative that enhances integration between Hong Kong, Macao and nine nearby cities in Guangdong Province, including Guangzhou. The joint hosting by Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao has further broken down administrative barriers between the three regions, more fully aligning rules, standards and recognition of qualifications, and bringing about joint innovation in the management of sports and events.

At the same time, through the hosting of a top-level sporting event, the Greater Bay Area is showcasing its capacity as a world-class city cluster and developing practical, shareable experience for building a globally renowned platform integrating sports, technology and culture. The joint hosting of the games across regions involves complex coordination in areas such as entry and exit, customs, taxation, and security. The resulting collaborative mechanism will provide a Greater Bay Area model for future cross-regional governance.

Under the One Country, Two Systems principle, while there is only one China, the mainland adheres to the socialist system and Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan will retain their own capitalist systems for the long term. Within this governance framework, the ongoing National Games are a major driver for Hong Kong and Macao to integrate into the overall development of the country.

Their role as co-hosts not only reflects the solid support of the Central Government for these two regions, but also develops the sense of national identity and patriotic spirit among their residents, especially young people.

This edition of the National Games is not only a sports gathering, but also an experimental project to promote the common development and prosperity of Hong Kong, Macao and the mainland. It is a strategic project to serve the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. The success of the games will have a positive impact on the integration process of the Greater Bay Area and the solid implementation of the One Country, Two Systems principle. **BR**



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THIRD CARRIER

The commissioning and flag-presenting ceremony of the *Fujian*, China's first aircraft carrier equipped with electromagnetic catapults, takes place at a naval port in Sanya City, Hainan Province, on November 5.

Named after Fujian Province and launched in June 2022, the vessel was independently designed and built by China. It is one of the country's three carriers currently in service.

XINHUA

In Harmony

Tourists feed black-headed gulls at the Haigeng Dam in Kunming, Yunnan Province, on November 10. Black-headed gulls migrate to Kunming for the warm weather there in winter, at which time their heads turn white.

Water Diversion Project

China on November 7 launched the construction of a major water diversion project designed to channel water into the 2,000-year-old Dujiangyan irrigation system, aiming to alleviate water shortages in the megacity of Chengdu, capital of Sichuan Province.

Transferring water from the Dadu River, the project will utilize a natural elevation drop to convey water through over 260 km of tunnels and pipelines to the Chengdu Plain, creating dual water sources in combination with the existing Minjiang River.

The whole project is scheduled to be completed in eight years.

For more than two millennia, Dujiangyan, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, has diverted water from the Minjiang, a tributary of the Yangtze River, creating the fertile land on the Chengdu Plain. However, rapid socio-economic development has exacerbated water scarcity in this region.

Sichuan's water resources are unevenly distributed. The basin area—hosting 80 percent of the province's population, cultivated land and economic output—possesses only 20 percent of its water resources. This imbalance is projected to worsen, with the Chengdu Plain economic zone's population expected to exceed 46 million by 2030, leading to a critical water supply gap by 2035.

Film Festival

The 2025 China Golden Rooster and Hundred Flowers Film Festival, featuring the 38th China Golden Rooster Awards, opened on November 11 in Xiamen, Fujian Province.

The opening ceremony included the lighting up of the golden rooster, as well as creative performances and the promotion of new films. Actors Huang Bo and Zhou Dongyu led the lighting ceremony, presenting a modern, minimalist and poetic opening show.

This year is the 130th anniversary of world cinema and the 120th anniversary of Chinese cinema. During the festival, events such as film screenings, academic forums and the Golden Rooster Film Venture Capital Conference were held, with the winners of this year's Golden Rooster Awards announced at the awards ceremony on November 15, the last day of the film festival.

AI Development

The U.S. and China are the two top global leaders in AI development, and China has the most generative AI patents from 2014 to 2023, an AI expert said after the International Institute for Management Development (IMD) released its AI Maturity Index on November 11.

IMD, based in Switzerland, is an independent university institute with campuses in Lausanne and Singapore, and recently established an in-country team in Shenzhen, Guangdong Province.

According to the second edition of the AI Maturity Index, which ranks companies on how effectively they have adopted AI to transform business strategies and operations, among the 300 top companies, the number of Chinese companies only followed that of the U.S.

In a virtual interview, Michael Wade, professor of strategy and digital at IMD and Director of the TONOMUS Global Center for Digital and AI Transformation, told Xinhua that China's dominance in AI patent filings and its focus on practical applications in manufacturing, healthcare, and autonomous vehicles provide a strong foundation for growth and value creation. "China leads the world in generative AI patents with over 38,210 filed from 2014 to 2023, substantially higher than the U.S.' 6,276 patents," he said.

Life Expectancy

The average life expectancy of Beijing residents rose to 83.93 years in 2024, up from 82.51 a year earlier, according to data released by the Beijing Municipal Health Commission on November 10.

Key maternal and infant health indicators have also reached internationally advanced levels, with a maternal mortality rate of 0.69 per 100,000 and an infant mortality rate of 1.35 per 1,000, the *Beijing News* reported.

Wang Jianhui, deputy director of the commission, said the improvements reflect the city's efforts to expand high-quality healthcare resources and strengthen primary medical services.

In recent years, Beijing has directed more medical resources to

underserved areas. The number of hospital beds per 1,000 residents in new urban districts has increased to 5.09, up 14.6 percent from 2021.

The capital has established 62 comprehensive medical alliances and 122 specialized medical consortia to promote tiered diagnosis and treatment. All secondary and higher-level general hospitals now have pediatric departments, while community health centers provide full coverage of children's medical services.

Additionally, 162 medical institutions have opened psychological clinics, and 94 offer sleep disorder treatments.

Sci-Tech Education

China has released a set of guidelines to strengthen science and technology education in primary and middle schools, aiming to establish a solid foundation for fostering sci-tech talent and thereby enhancing the country's self-reliance and strength in this field.

By 2030, a science and technology education system for primary and secondary schools is expected to be largely established. Moreover, by 2035, a sci-tech education ecosystem will be fully formed, helping China become a leading country in education, according to the guidelines jointly issued by the Ministry of Education (MOE) and other authorities.

At a press conference about the guidelines on November 12, Tian Zuyin, an MOE official in charge of basic education, said the period of primary and middle schools is important for cultivating students' interest in science, innovative consciousness and practical ability.

Thanks to continuous efforts, notable progress has been made in recent years, Tian said. For example, since 2022, science and technology museums across the country have cooperated with more than 14,000 primary and middle schools to host 48,000 immersive and interactive activities.

Strengthening young people's sci-tech and innovation capabilities at an early stage of elementary education is instrumental in discovering and fostering future scientists and engineers, noted Xu Xuejun, Vice President of Shanghai-based Tongji University.

To further improve science and technology education, the guidelines put forward six tasks, calling for efforts to reform teaching methods, strengthen interdisciplinary integration, and build a strong force of teachers.

Marine Tourism

Hainan Province launched its 2026 Marine Tourism Year with a ceremony in Wanning City, highlighting the island's coastal culture and growing marine tourism sector.

The event was held at Riyue Bay, a world-renowned surfing destination, and featured international surfers showcasing Hainan's beaches and water sports.

The initiative aims to strengthen Hainan's marine economy and shift the province's tourism model from traditional coastal sightseeing to immersive, activity-based experiences.

Under the theme "Coasts in Hainan, Joys of Journey," the 2026 program will offer 60 high-quality marine tourism products, including water sports, and festivals. Ten core island-wide itineraries, including coastal relaxation tours and six immersive ocean experiences, are also planned.

The campaign aims to attract 18 million marine tourism visitors and generate over 40 billion yuan ($5.6 billion) in revenue by 2027. A Hainan Marine Tourism Guide (2026) was released to help visitors explore the offerings.

XINHUA

Shopping Carnival

A livestreamer promotes products at a culture and tourism industrial demonstration base in Shijiazhuang City, Hebei Province, on November 11. E-commerce and logistics companies across China were working at full capacity during the annual Double Eleven shopping festival which falls on November 11.

XINHUA

Media Technology on Show

A visitor experiences a virtual stage during the 2025 China New Media Technology Exhibition in Changsha, capital of Hunan Province, on November 12. The 2025 China New Media Conference, which ran from November 11 to 13, showcased a range of cutting-edge technologies related to news production.

Private Investment

The government introduced a package of measures on November 10 to promote the development of private investment.

According to a notice released by the General Office of the State Council, the highest state administrative organ, private capital is supported to participate in key projects in areas including rail and nuclear power that require approval or verification from government departments and have a certain level of returns, and requirements such as its shareholding ratios should be clearly defined.

The participation of private capital is also encouraged for the construction and operation of some new urban infrastructure projects, per the notice.

Additionally, efforts will be made to remove unreasonable access restrictions for business entities in the services sectors.

The notice also focuses on implementing a special action for the digital empowerment of small and medium-sized enterprises, and on allowing more qualified private investment projects to issue real estate investment trusts in the infrastructure sector.

These measures address the concerns of private enterprises by expanding access, removing bottlenecks and strengthening guarantees, thereby better stimulating the internal driving force of private investment, said Ma Shuang, a professor at the University of International Business and Economics.

Monetary Policy Instruments

China's outstanding balance of structural monetary policy instruments was 3.9 trillion yuan ($547 billion) at the end of September, according to data from the People's Bank of China (PBC), the country's central bank, released on November 11.

In a quarterly report, the central bank said that during the third quarter, it had efficiently implemented multiple structural monetary policy instruments and vigorously promoted technology finance, green finance, inclusive finance, pension finance and digital finance.

By the end of September, technology loans, green loans, inclusive loans, pension industry loans and digital economy industry loans had increased by 11.8 percent, 22.9 percent, 11.2 percent, 58.2 percent, and 12.9 percent year on year, respectively, all exceeding the overall loan growth rate.

Experts note that the PBC's structural monetary policy instruments are primarily aimed at incentivizing and guiding financial institutions to support key sectors and vulnerable areas in line with major national strategies and socioeconomic development.

The PBC affirmed that it will diligently advance technology finance, green finance, inclusive finance, pension finance and digital finance, according to the report.

NEV Output and Sales

New-energy vehicle (NEV) production jumped 33.1 percent year on year to nearly 13.02 million units in China during the first 10 months of the year, according to data released by the China Association of Automobile Manufacturers (CAAM) on November 11.

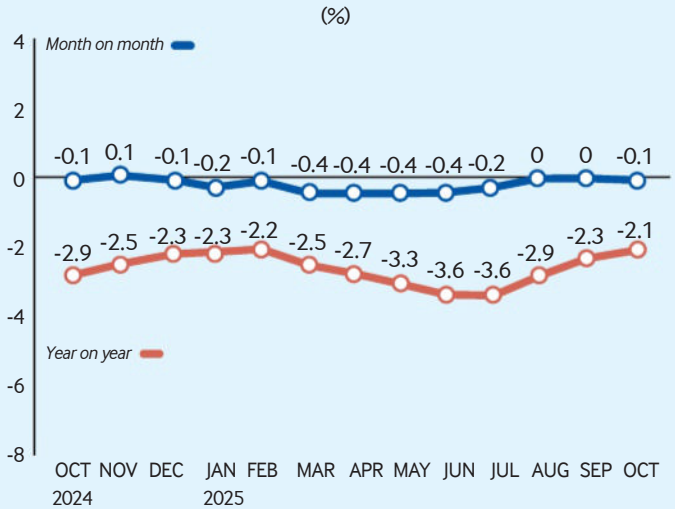
Sales during the same period climbed 32.7 percent year on year to more than 12.94 million units, accounting for 46.7 percent of total new vehicle sales domestically, CAAM data showed.

In October alone, NEV sales reached nearly 1.72 million units, accounting for 51.6 percent of all new vehicle sales. This was also the first time that NEV sales accounted for more than half of all new vehicle sales in the country.

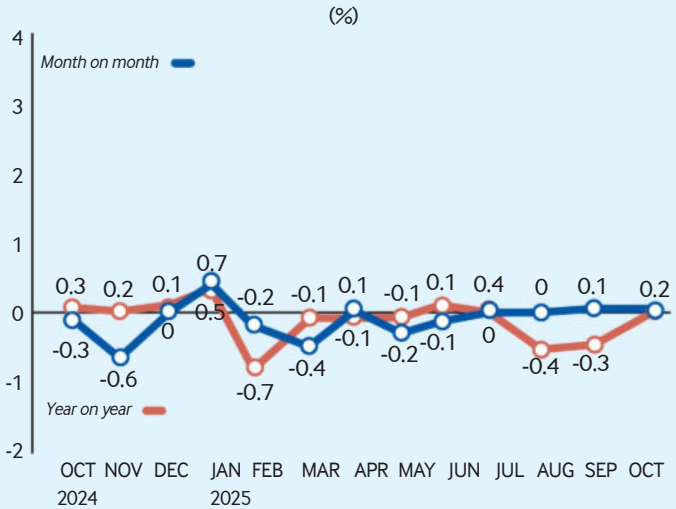
Total auto output topped 27.69 million units in the first 10 months, a 13.2-percent year-on-year increase, while sales grew 12.4 percent to nearly 27.69 million units.

NUMBERS

China's Producer Price Index (PPI) Growth



China's Consumer Price Index (CPI) Growth



The data also showed that China's auto exports rose 15.7 percent year on year to 5.62 million units during the same period. Notably, NEV exports surged 90.4 percent year on year to 2.01 million units.

Foreign Trade

China's goods imports and exports totaled 37.31 trillion yuan ($5.2 trillion) from January to October, up 3.6 percent year on year, according to the General Administration of Customs of China (GACC).

In October alone, the country's goods imports and exports edged up 0.1 percent year on year to 3.7 trillion yuan ($519 billion). Exports slipped 0.8 percent from a year earlier, but imports climbed 1.4 percent, marking a fifth straight month of expansion.

Lu Daliang, Director of GACC's Department of Statistics and Analysis, said that despite external shocks, China's foreign trade has demonstrated strong resilience this year, continuing its sustained steady expansion, which is a hard-won result.

In the first 10 months, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was China's largest trading partner. The trade value between the two sides rose 9.1 percent year on year and accounted for 16.6 percent of China's total foreign trade value.

China has remained ASEAN's largest trading partner for 16 consecutive years, while ASEAN has been China's top trading partner for five consecutive years.

During the 10-month period, China's trade with the EU grew 4.9 percent, while China-U.S. trade fell 15.9 percent. Trade increased 5.9 percent with countries involved in the Belt and Road Initiative, a China-proposed initiative to boost connectivity along and beyond the ancient Silk Road routes.

Private enterprises' combined import and export value growing 7.2 percent to 21.28 trillion yuan ($3 trillion), accounting for 57 percent of the country's total and increasing 1.9 percentage points from the same period last year.

China's foreign trade continued to undergo a structural shift as exports of mechanical and electrical products grew 8.7 percent, accounting for 60.7 percent of total exports, driven by strong growth in integrated circuits and automobiles, while labor-intensive products saw a 3-percent decline.

Recycled Non-Ferrous Metals

The recycled non-ferrous metals industry has posted rapid growth during the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25) period, with its annual production of recycled non-ferrous metals expected to reach 20 million tons this year, per the latest industry data.

The domestic output of recycled non-ferrous metals has grown at an average annual rate of 7.2 percent since 2021, reaching 19.15 million tons in 2024.

During the 2021-24 period, China accounted for a third of the world's total production of recycled non-ferrous metals, Ge Honglin, President of the China Non-Ferrous Metals Industry Association, said at a recent industrial convention in Chengdu, capital of Sichuan Province.

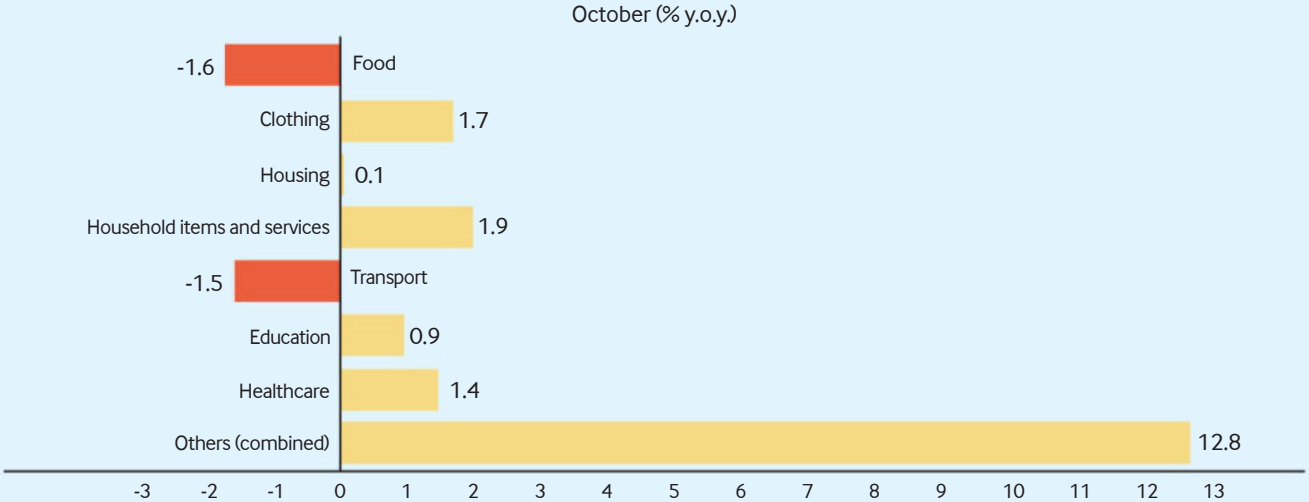
This rise in production contributed to saving 3.6 billion tons of mining resources during the same period, and to reducing carbon dioxide emissions by 560 million tons, according to data from the association.

Technological innovation in the sector has boosted the utilization of recycled resources. A growing number of companies in China now use recycled metals as a major source of raw materials, with some manufacturers reporting that such materials constitute more than 60 percent of their total input of raw materials, the association said.

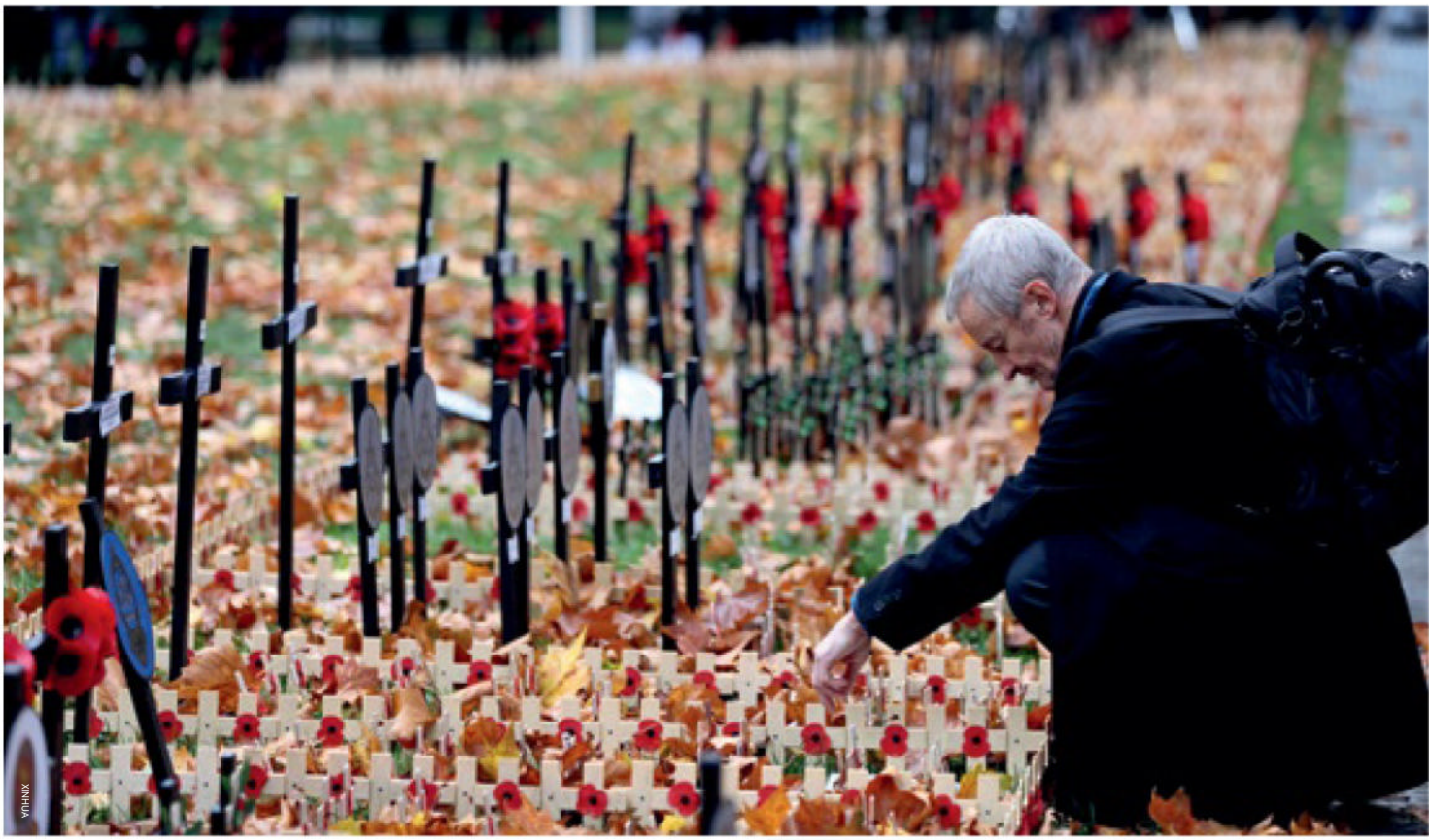
In the next five years, China will intensify efforts to promote the high-quality development of the recycled non-ferrous metals industry by enhancing its supply system, expanding the utilization of recycled non-ferrous metals in more fields, and strengthening the sector's digital transition, Ge noted.

China's CPI Growth by Type

October (% y.o.y.)



(Source: *National Bureau of Statistics*)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UNITED KINGDOM

A man places a poppy and a cross at the Field of Remembrance at Westminster Abbey in London on November 10, a day before Remembrance Day, which is observed to remember the sacrifices made by soldiers during World War II

GERMANY

An exhibitor and buyers at a booth at Bazaar Berlin in Berlin on November 5. Around 500 manufacturers and traders from all over the world attended the event, held from November 5 to 9

XINHUA

XINHUA

RUSSIA

A woman takes a selfie at an outdoor exhibition commemorating the 1941 October Revolution Parade in Moscow's Red Square, on November 7

BRAZIL

The venue of the 30th United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP30) in Belém November 10. The COP30 kicked off that day with the aim of putting the fight against climate change back in the center of international priorities

XINHUA

XINHUA

XINHUA

PAKISTAN

The site of a suicide bombing in Islamabad on November 11. At least 12 people were killed and 27 others injured

CAMBODIA

King Norodom Sihamoni lights the ceremonial victory fire inside the Independence Monument in Phnom Penh on November 9, as the country commemorated the 72nd anniversary of its national independence from French colonial rule

YOUNG MATHEMATICIAN WINS AWARDS

Wang Hong, a Chinese mathematician, received two prestigious mathematics awards in late October, the 2025 Salem Prize and the International Congress of Chinese Mathematicians (ICCM) Gold Medal, cementing her status as a rising star in the mathematical community.

The Salem Prize, launched by the U.S.-based Institute for Advanced Study, is widely regarded as a predictor for the prestigious Fields Medal, with 10 of its 56 recipients between 1968 and 2024 later winning the Fields Medal. Meanwhile, the ICCM Gold Medal is often called the "Chinese Fields Medal."

The 34-year-old mathematician's academic journey includes undergraduate studies at Peking University, followed by advanced degrees from France's École Polytechnique and Paris-Saclay University, and a Ph.D. from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. She is now a professor at the New York University's Courant Institute of Mathematical Sciences.

Liquidize to Localize

Gmw.cn

November 12

On November 10, Chinese private equity firm CPE Yuanfeng said it would form a joint venture with Burger King to operate the chain's business in China, in which it will hold about 83 percent of the venture's shares. The move is not an isolated case. Just days earlier, Starbucks struck a similar deal with Boyu Capital, handing up to 60 percent of its shares in the country to the Chinese asset management firm.

Perhaps the most striking case came in 2017, when McDonald's changed its registered business name in China to "Golden Arches," after selling most of its stake to local investors. At the time, the deal was seen as an anomaly. Today, however, this kind of joint venture has become routine.

Behind these regroupings lies a deeper shift. Foreign brands are discovering that success in the Chinese market now depends on an intimate understanding of Chinese consumers—their fast-changing tastes, regional differences and digital habits.

In this evolving landscape, "local" and "global" are no longer opposing forces but converging ones. The result is a new hybrid business ecosystem—one in which the world's largest consumer market is not merely a destination for export, but a force reshaping how global brands think, operate and compete.

Road Running Revolution

Oriental Outlook

October 16

In recent years, road running—long-distance running on paved streets—has transformed from a niche pursuit into one of China's most dynamic sports trends. According to a report by the Chinese Athletics Association, 749 road races were held across the country in 2024, drawing more than 7 million participants. From the 86 runners who signed up for the inaugural Beijing Marathon in 1981 to a record 410,000 participants who took part in

"Climate change bears on humanity's shared future. From the Global South to the Global North, from developing countries to developed countries, we are all passengers aboard the same ship."

Foreign Ministry spokesperson **Guo Jiakun**, commenting on the ongoing UN Climate Change Conference in Belém, Brazil, at a news briefing on November 12

"Despite tough conditions with constantly drifting sea ice, we achieved precise guidance and safe surfacing, significantly expanding China's manned submersible operational range in polar regions."

Huang Xiaoxia, a researcher at the Chinese Academy of Sciences, commenting on the performance of the *Fendouzhe* submersible vessel during China's 15th Arctic Ocean Scientific Expedition between July and October

43 races across 40 cities on April 20 this year, the sport's growth has been nothing short of extraordinary.

The boom has also sent ripples far beyond the track. Major races draw runners from across China and beyond, breathing new life into local tourism, hospitality and retail. Across Chinese cities, running-centered industries have taken root, offering everything from athletic gear and marathon training courses to health management services. Meanwhile, crossover trends such as "music runs," "charity runs" and "rural runs" have woven the sport ever more deeply into the fabric of leisure, culture and community life.

Hosting a marathon, however, is a demanding test of a city's management prowess—from logistics and medical care to traffic control and public communication. As the running boom continues, side effects have also kicked in: Some races have faced complaints over poor organization and inadequate supplies, while others struggle to distinguish themselves amid a host of similar events.

Without stronger safeguards and more creative planning, the very enthusiasm that fueled the boom could begin to wear thin. Only when cities deliver better infrastructure and services and runners reciprocate with civility and discipline can road running continue to thrive.

Remote Repair

Guangzhou Daily

November 5

In a sign of how technology is reshaping medicine, a surgeon in Guangzhou has recently performed the world's first remote robot-assisted subretinal injection on a patient 4,200 km away in Urumqi, capital of Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region. The procedure relied on a domestically developed 5G-powered surgical robot, marking China's first successful clinical application of high-precision, long-distance ophthalmic surgery after years of laboratory trials.

The breakthrough tackles a long-standing imbalance in China's healthcare system. The country has one of the world's largest populations of visually impaired patients, but advanced ophthalmic expertise remains clustered in major cities. Once widely adopted, remote surgery could help bridge that divide, allowing patients in less developed regions to receive top-tier care without traveling far from home.

The operation also highlights AI's expanding role in medicine. Subretinal injections require the highest level of precision, which is hard to achieve even for the steadiest hands. Robot-assisted surgeries remove this limitation by providing consistent stability and accuracy.

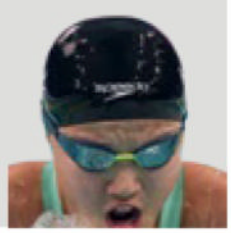
Over the past few years, AI has found its way into a wide range of healthcare settings, from cancer screening and virtual consultations to critical care and health management. Its broad application is making medical services not only more efficient, but also more equitable.

TEENAGE SWIMMER BREAKS ASIAN RECORD

Yu Zidi, a 13-year-old swimmer, made history at the 15th National Games by winning the women's 200-meter individual medley in 2:07.41, breaking the Asian and national records previously held by Ye Shiwen since the 2012 London Olympics. With this victory, Yu became the youngest swimmer ever to hold an Asian record.

The prodigy from Baoding, Hebei Province, began swimming at 6 and was quickly noted for her exceptional feel for the water and powerful kick. After only six years of formal training, she has risen to world-class level.

In 2024, Yu claimed two national titles at China's Summer Swimming Championships. Earlier this year, she reached two individual finals at the World Aquatics Championships in Singapore, and as part of the relay team, became the youngest medalist in the competition's history.



"The opening ceremony highlighted the charm of the Greater Bay Area, our shared roots in folk culture, our common vision for the future and the latest technological achievements."

Qiao Wei, chief scriptwriter for the 15th National Games opening ceremony, in a China Central Television interview about the event's design philosophy

"Now, we are not only holding the desert back but also growing rich from it."

Pan Duozhu, a farmer in Alxa League, Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, telling Xinhua News Agency how the cultivation of a prized medicinal plant known as "desert ginseng" in the Ulan Buh Desert has brought about both ecological and economic benefits

COVER STORY

FROM THE PODIUM TO THE PEOPLE

How the meaning of sports is being redefined in China

By Zhang Yage

Fans cheer for the local soccer team in Nantong, Jiangsu Province, on November 1

XINHUA

The opening ceremony of the 15th National Games in Guangzhou, Guangdong Province, on November 9 was more than a spectacle of light and sound. It was a powerful statement. As the vibrant tapestry of local culture in south China unfolded, it wasn't just heralding the beginning of China's highest level domestic sports competition; it was showing a profound shift.

For decades, the National Games have served a purpose: to be the Olympic Games training ground. With the value of sports measured in gold medals and world records, the Games have been a crucible for forging champions who would elevate national prestige on the global stage.

But the narrative has been quietly changing. The National Games arena is embracing its identity also as a platform for promoting public participation in sports, marking a pivotal chapter in China's ambitious journey to become a leading sports nation.

This transformation from a medal-centric stage to an inclusive, people-oriented event is not merely a change in marketing slogans. It is a deliberate, top-down policy evolution, reflecting a nation's growing confidence and a redefined understanding of what it means to be a sports powerhouse. True strength, it seems, is no longer found only on the Olympic podium, but in the bustling public parks, the newly emerging "village soccer super league," and the everyday health of its 1.4 billion citizens.

The strategic shift

This year's National Games, jointly hosted by Guangdong and Hong Kong and Macao special administrative regions, are taking place in the Greater Bay Area until November 21. The Games, held once every four years, have a competition program similar to that of the Olympics. Over 14,000 professional athletes are competing in this year's competitive events and mass sports events have involved more than 1 million amateurs.

The origins of the National Games are deeply rooted in national identity. Inaugurated in 1959 to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China, the first Games were a symbol of resilience and burgeoning statehood. For years, its primary function was clear: to identify and hone talent for the international arena, particularly the Olympics. The whole-nation system, which marshaled state resources to develop elite athletes, found its expression in the National Games.

The success of this model is undeniable. It has produced legends and propelled China into the upper echelons of Olympic medal tables. However, following the spectacular 2008 Beijing Olympics, a quiet shift began. The question was no longer just "How many golds can we win?" but "How can the power of sports benefit every single citizen?"

The results of this introspection have been codified into policy. In 2008, August 8, the opening day of the Beijing Olympics, was designated as National Fitness Day, a symbolic move to channel Olympic fervor into public participation. The momentum increased in 2014, when the State Council issued guidelines explicitly elevating fitness for all to a national strategy.

The National Games, as the pinnacle of the domestic sports system, were the obvious platform for carrying out this new directive. The change was both symbolic and structural. The 2017 National Games in Tianjin Municipality served as a watershed moment, introducing 126 amateur events in 19 sports that brought 70,000 ordinary citizens—factory workers, students, retirees—onto the same stage as Olympic champions. Now, the 2025 Games in the Greater Bay Area have expanded this further, featuring 166 events for amateurs in 23 sports, including dragon boat racing, *weiqi* (Go), roller-skating and lion dance.

Gao Zhidan, head of the General Administration of Sport of China (GASC), has articulated this multifaceted vision clearly: "Sports are an important means to meet people's aspirations for a better life, a significant driver for economic and social development, and a key platform for showcasing national cultural soft power." The National Games are now aligned in pursuit of these goals. ▶▶

The shared arena

The most visible manifestation of this transformation is the literal sharing of the arena. The 15th National Games brilliantly blurred the lines between the superstars and amateurs, creating a powerful sense of a shared national endeavor.

Consider the torch relay. Once the domain of celebrated athletes, the torchbearers for this Games were a mosaic of Chinese society. Alongside sporting icons were grassroots sports workers, delivery drivers, sanitation workers, and community volunteers. The flame was no longer just a symbol of elite competition; it became a beacon for collective spirit.

This ethos reached its apex at the opening ceremony. Among the torchbearers at the ceremony was Lai Xuanzhi, a primary school physical education teacher. Though not a competitive athlete himself, Lai is a giant of grassroots sports education. Faced with a rural school lacking sports facilities, he trained students to jump rope. Through ingenuity and dedication, he invented the half-squat skipping technique, crafted lightweight jump ropes from motorcycle brake cables, and cultivated an astonishing 52 world champion jump ropers among his students, breaking 13 world records. His presence, passing the torch alongside celebrated professional athletes, was a profound statement: The sports educator is as worthy of honor as most gifted athletes.

On the competition floor, this "shared arena" philosophy came to life. The mass-participation events were not sidelined; they were integral. On the gateball courts, competitors aged from 19 to 70 swung their mallets with equal passion. In the air volleyball finals, 59-year-old Hu Yue, the oldest player on the Guangdong women's team, radiated pure joy despite finishing fourth. Her story was not about the medal that got away, but about the enduring happiness that sports provide.

Even the legends, the very products of the old system, are now embodying the spirit of the new. Table tennis maestro Ma Long, at 37, is on his sixth and likely final National Games campaign. Already a "super grand slam" winner, he is chasing the one title that has eluded him: a men's team gold at the National Games. His persistence is no longer just about personal glory, but about loyalty to his Beijing team and the love of the game. Similarly, sprinter Su Bingtian, the "Asian Flash" who broke the 10-second barrier, chose to cherish this opportunity to fulfil his duty in the 4x100m relay, passing the baton—and his legacy—to the next generation.

Their stories, covered with the same reverence as their Olympic triumphs, are woven into a broader narrative that now includes the grassroots hero. The message is clear: Every participant, from star athletes to a first-time mass-event competitor, is a vital part of China's sporting ecosystem.

Sports as a growth engine

The transformation of the National Games is both a cause and effect of a wider phenomenon sweeping China: the recognition of sports as a potent economic and social catalyst. Beyond the stadiums of the Games, a grassroots sports economy is booming, demonstrating that the national fitness strategy is also a savvy economic policy.

The most dazzling example is the "Su Chao" (Jiangsu Super League). What began as an amateur soccer league has exploded into a blueprint for regional development. Its model is a masterclass in integration. With tickets priced accessibly between 5 and 20 yuan ($0.7-2.81), the league ensured mass appeal. The real genius, however, was leveraging that popularity to boost local economy. A match ticket doubled as a passport, granting holders free access to local tourist sites, complimentary meals, and discounts on accommodation.

The economic ripple effect was staggering. According to the Jiangsu Provincial Administration of Sport, for every yuan ($0.14) spent on a ticket, 7.3 yuan ($1) was generated in peripheral consumption. During the 2025 season, sales of soccer gear in Jiangsu surged nearly 80 percent, and broader entertainment-related spending skyrocketed 34.6 percent. One online

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Students play on a rooftop soccer field in Yuexiu District of Guangzhou, Guangdong Province, on November 4

XINHUA

The opening ceremony of the 15th National Games in Guangzhou on November 9

campaign alone stimulated over 13.5 billion yuan ($1.89 billion) in consumption in just two months.

As Peng Guoqiang, Dean of the School of Physical Education and Humanities at Nanjing Sport Institute and Vice President of the China Competitive Sports Research Institute, noted, "The Su Chao has broken the traditional model of event operations... It transforms sports venues into consumption hotspots, turns the competitive stage into an economic engine, and extends watching a game into a weekend vacation."

This synergy is being replicated nationwide, from the blazingly popular Village Soccer Super League (Cun Chao) in Guizhou to emerging urban sports festivals. The policy of "bringing sporting events into scenic spots, streets, and business districts" and the trend of "traveling to follow the sports events" have made sports a golden key for unlocking domestic consumption and fostering integrated cultural-tourism-commerce development.

Building the foundation

None of this participation is possible without infrastructure. The ambitious drive to build "15-minute fitness circles"—where urban residents can access sports facilities within a 15-minute walk—has yielded remarkable results. By the end of 2024, China's total sports venue area had reached 4.23 billion square meters, a massive increase from just a few years prior. The country has built over 1,300 sports parks, and in less than three years, installed over 170,000 fitness facilities in older residential communities and urban parks.

"This 15-minute fitness circle goal has now been largely realized in communities," said Ding Dong, Director of the Mass Sports Department of the GASC.

This infrastructure push is characterized by ingenuity. Idle spaces under overpasses, in old factories, and in urban corners are being repurposed into vibrant, well-lit courts and fitness stations. A disused factory in Langfang, Hebei Province, became a community sports center; the space beneath a metro bridge in Shenzhen, Guangdong Province, was transformed into a pickleball and badminton court. These are examples of the priority placed on sports development as part of urban renewal, making fitness a convenient and integrated part of daily life.

Simultaneously, a renewed focus is being placed on youth health and fitness. In addressing concerns over adolescent myopia and obesity, sports are a crucial intervention. Initiatives like the "Running Youth" campaign, which involved 151 million participants in over 145,000 activities, aim to instill a "health first" mindset from an early age. The emergence of events like the Ivy International Schoolympics, which creates a compelling sports-education synergy, and the development of robust "city-county-school" youth competition systems in places like Heze, Shandong Province, shows a concerted effort to build a sustainable talent pipeline and a healthier future generation.

A new chapter

The journey of the National Games mirrors China's own journey in the world of sports. It began with a need for recognition, measured in the hard currency of Olympic medals. Today, it reflects a more mature, holistic and ambitious vision. A true sports power is not just defined by the height of its podium but by the depth of its participation, the health of its people, and the vitality of its sporting culture.

The Games are not only about athletic brilliance, but also about empowered participation. The National Games have finally become what its name suggested: a true games for the entire nation, proving that the most significant victory is not just winning gold, but getting a nation to fall in love with sports itself. **BR**

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COVER STORY

THE GREATER (BAY) GAMES

The National Games are weaving Guangdong, Hong Kong, and Macao closer through sports By Yuan Yuan

A landmark cycling race made history at China's National Games on November 8. At 9 a.m., 103 cyclists set off from Zhuhai in Guangdong Province, entering Macao Special Administrative Region (SAR) before continuing to Hong Kong SAR via the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge—the world's longest sea-crossing bridge. After passing Hong Kong Disneyland, the riders raced back along the bridge before arriving at the finish line in Zhuhai. The event was the Games' first-ever road race spanning Guangdong and the two SARs, and competitors seamlessly cleared immigration checkpoints six times along the route.

Min Yuntong, Deputy Secretary General of the Zhuhai Committee for the National Games, said the race was more than an athletic contest—it showcased a new model of regional cooperation and reflected the integrated development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA).

The flow of connection

The 15th National Games is the first cohosted with an SAR, with Hong Kong and Macao jointly hosting the event with 19 cities in Guangdong.

The symbolic elements of the Games reflected this tripartite collaboration. The mascots, Xi Yangyang and Le Rongrong drew inspiration from the Chinese white dolphin, an iconic species of the GBA waters that connect the three territories. Similarly, the Games' emblem features three-colored petals representing Guangdong's kapok trees, Hong Kong's bauhinia, and Macao's lotus—botanical symbols of unity in diversity.

Behind the scenes, making cross-border competition possible requires meticulous planning and unprecedented cooperation. "These cross-border competitions require joint planning and close coordination among the three regions in every aspect, from designing the race routes to facilitating rapid customs clearance for athletes, spectators, and vehicles," explained Yeung Tak-keung, head of the Coordination Office for the 15th National Games. The logistical achievement represented a template for future regional integration, proving that administrative barriers could be overcome through shared objectives and careful planning.

This spirit of coordination extended into every aspect of the Games, from venue arrangement to event design. Winfried Engelbrecht-Bresges, CEO of the Hong Kong Jockey Club (HKJC), expressed his enthusiasm for the event in an interview with Xinhua News Agency: "It's fantastic to see the cities coming together to celebrate sports," he said, highlighting the Shenzhen Guangming International Equestrian Center as a prime example of Hong Kong-mainland cooperation for the Games with the HKJC providing professional advice and technical support during the construction of the equestrian facilities.

"From the start, we offered development guidance to ensure the venue meets world-class standards," he said. "One aspect we're especially proud of is the first tailor-made equine hospital, which reflects the highest commitment to animal welfare and could serve as a model for the future."

The German CEO also emphasized a groundbreaking collaboration between the National Games and the HKJC's world-class anti-doping laboratory to ensure the integrity of equestrian competitions. "This partnership guarantees world-class facilities, top-level expertise, and fairness throughout the Games," he added.

Looking beyond the current Games, Engelbrecht-Bresges sees significant potential for equestrian cooperation across the GBA. "The National Games is a wonderful example of how cities can work together to create an economic, social, and cultural cluster. We see multiple opportunities in equestrian sports and horse racing."

He revealed that one of the HKJC's earliest initiatives in the Chinese mainland was during the 2010 Guangzhou Asian Games, where it helped establish the first equine disease-free zone. "The legacy is now a training center for horse racing in Guangzhou," he noted, illustrating how sporting collaborations can create lasting infrastructure.

"Equestrian sports have a great future in Shenzhen," Engelbrecht-Bresges predicted. "The city has a unique opportunity to become a center of excellence. The key is to organize regular competitions and get people excited about horses." His vision extends beyond

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Trainees from Tang Siu Man's rowing club participate in rowing training in Zhuhai, Guangdong Province, on June 21

individual cities to regional transformation. "I see great potential for this area to become a hub for equestrian sports and horse racing. We will help build an equestrian cluster in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao region."

A sporting future

Professor Zhang Guangnan, Director of Center of Guangzhou, Hong Kong and Macao Regional Studies at Sun Yat-sen University, said the National Games have served as both a showcase and catalyst for the accelerated connectivity within the GBA in recent years.

With the regional transportation network continuously improving, the "half-hour living circle" and "one-hour economic circle" are gradually becoming a reality. "In this context, sports have evolved from mere recreation to become both a magnet attracting people across boundaries and an engine powering the social and cultural connectivity of the GBA," he told *People's Daily*.

Hong Kong rowing coach Tang Siu Man, a former member of the Hong Kong rowing team, has won numerous honors in major competitions such as the Asian Rowing Championships. In 2020, invited by a Macao rowing coach, she visited Hengqin, a vibrant island district of Zhuhai to observe a competition and was captivated by the vibrant area. At that time, Hengqin was actively building a diverse sports and cultural ecosystem, and although rowing was still in its early stages there, she decided to put down roots and open a new chapter in her rowing career.

Today, the rowing club she founded has become a team that brings together members from all three regions of the GBA. With her partners, she also established the Hengqin Youth Rowing Team and provides athlete training for the Macao Polytechnic University as well as local schools in Hengqin. Through years of exploration and promotion, they have successfully transformed rowing from a niche sport into a new signature water activity of the GBA.

Renowned Hong Kong cyclist and world champion Wong Wan Yiu chose to settle in Shenzhen, Guangdong, after retiring, where she founded a BMX club dedicated to promoting cycling among young people. "I can see the sea right from my window. In my free time, I often cycle dozens of kilometers along the coast alone," she told Xinhua. "On weekends, friends from Hong Kong come to Shenzhen to cycle together, and more than 30 Hong Kong children regularly come to the club for training."

In her eyes, Shenzhen is a cycling-friendly city with not only multiple scenic coastal cycling paths but also frequent cycling events, well-developed facilities, and a strong cycling culture.

Ahead of the National Games, approximately 500 young people from across the GBA gathered in Guangzhou for a mass participation health run event.

Hong Kong pacemaker Lee Cho Wai, a former member of the Hong Kong athletics team who still holds the 800-meter record at the Hong Kong Athletics Championships, captured the deeper significance of the event. "Running alongside young friends from the GBA not only enhances mutual understanding and friendship, but somehow strengthens our shared sense of national identity," Lee told Xinhua. **BR**

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COVER STORY

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The 15th National Games aren't just for professional athletes—they also feature 166 events in 23 sports for amateurs, ranging from Chinese chess to *taijiquan*. Most of these events took place before the games officially opened on November 9. **BR**

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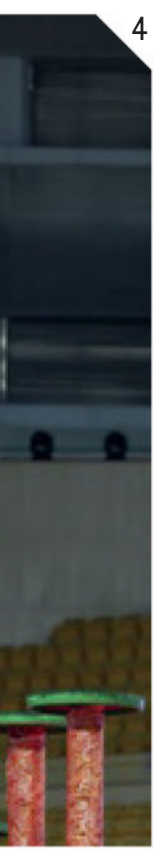
1. The *taijiquan* final in Foshan, Guangdong Province, on September 27. Also known as tai chi, this traditional Chinese martial art is practiced for defense training, health benefits and meditation

2. A National Games dragon boat race in Foshan on July 5

3. Amateur wrestlers compete during the Chinese wrestling final in Qingyuan, Guangdong Province, on July 24

4. Henan Province's dragon and lion dance team performs in Foshan on November 11

5. A National Games gateball qualifier in Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture, Jilin Province, on April 2



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A Blueprint for People-Centered Development

By Carlos Martinez

The 20th Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee held its fourth plenary session in Beijing on October 20-23. The plenary session's central task was to deliberate on the framework of the country's next national development roadmap: the 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-30), which will be formally adopted at next year's full session of the National People's Congress, China's top legislature.

Every five-year plan is important but this one arrives at a truly pivotal moment in terms of China's development trajectory and the global environment.

The CPC's 20th National Congress in October 2022 laid out a two-step strategic proposal for building China into a "great modern socialist country in all respects" by the middle of the century. The first step is to "basically achieve socialist modernization" by 2035. The period from 2026 to 2030 will be critically important in consolidating the foundations for reaching that milestone.

At the plenary session, General Secretary of the CPC Central Committee Xi Jinping, also Chinese President and Chairman of the Central Military Commission, observed that the 15th Five-Year Plan period will serve as a critical stage in building on past successes to break new ground for basically achieving socialist modernization.

Xi further elaborated on the meaning of "basically achieving socialist modernization," noting that it would include China's per-capita GDP reaching the level of the mid-level developed countries. There is no internationally agreed definition of this category, but a State Council analysis in 2021 estimated that it would correspond to a per-capita GDP of about $30,000, just over double China's current level.

Meanwhile, the 15th Five-Year Plan is being drafted against a backdrop of intensifying global turbulence. The U.S. in particular is responding to the rise of China and the emergence of a more multipolar world order with a New Cold War strategy designed to perpetuate U.S. hegemony and hobble China's progress.

In the face of a highly unpredictable tariff war, export controls, unilateralism, protectionism and so-called decoupling—along with an escalating campaign of encirclement and containment—China's strategists necessarily have to focus on deepening domestic innovation and technological self-reliance.

A modernized industrial system

The communique released following the conclusion of the plenum summed up the key tasks of the 15th Five-Year Plan. It says that China should maintain focus on the real economy, continue to pursue smart, green and integrated development, and work faster to boost its strength in manufacturing, product quality, aerospace, transportation and cyberspace. The share of manufacturing in the national economy should be kept at an appropriate level, and a modernized industrial system should be developed with advanced manufacturing as the backbone.

The meeting called for "extraordinary measures" to achieve "decisive breakthroughs" in semiconductors and other advanced technologies, including AI, quantum computing, hydrogen energy, nuclear fusion and 6G mobile communications. The most important factor in promoting high-quality development is accelerating high-level scientific and technological self-reliance.

Common prosperity and people-centered development

If technological upgrading forms one pillar of the plan, common prosperity forms the other.

China defines modernization not as the enrichment of an elite, but as "modernization of common prosperity for all," with full and high-quality employment, a fairer income distribution, a stronger safety net, improved public health and education, integrated urban-rural development, and rural revitalization as central components.

The document of recommendations for formulating the 15th Five-Year Plan, adopted at the recent plenary session of the 20th CPC Central Committee, is firmly anchored in the goal of common prosperity for all and the need to ensure and improve the people's wellbeing. The document recommends a series of balanced and accessible policies and measures to promote high-quality full employment, optimize the income distribution system, develop education that meets the people's expectations, refine the social security system, promote high-quality development in the real estate sector, advance the Healthy China Initiative, bolster high-quality population development, and make steady efforts to ensure equitable access to basic public services.

As such, the plan represents a comprehensive blueprint for people-centered development, integrating people's wellbeing with the nation's long-term strategic interests.

In pursuit of ecological civilization

The concept that "lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets," summarized

as "green is gold," continues to anchor China's environmental agenda.

The 15th Five-Year Plan emphasizes the need to accelerate the green transition in all areas of economic and social development in an effort to build a Beautiful China. It commits to making concerted efforts to achieve peak carbon emissions and carbon neutrality, strengthen ecosystem restoration and pollution reduction, and build a new energy system, while "accelerating the shift to eco-friendly production practices and lifestyles."

China already leads the world in renewable energy, electric vehicles, biodiversity protection, forestation, pollution control, electrification and energy efficiency. It is the first major country to have successfully made green development a core national strategy and a driver of economic growth.

The 15th Five-Year Plan will further consolidate and expand these achievements, integrating the commitment to carbon neutrality into all aspects of development.

Democratic governance: from the masses, to the masses

A striking feature of the drafting process of the document of recommendations is the depth of public participation. The drafting group sent investigation teams to 12 provincial-level regions, visited 66 grassroots organizations, held symposiums with experts, and conducted a month-long online consultation that generated over 3.11 million public submissions and more than 1,500 constructive proposals.

By the end of the process, 2,112 suggestions had been incorporated, resulting in 218 revisions to the draft.

This reflects an enduring principle of CPC governance—the mass line, famously articulated by Mao Zedong. The CPC should go to the people and learn from them, synthesize their experience into better, articulated principles and methods, then call upon the people to put these principles and methods into practice so as to solve their problems and help them achieve liberation and happiness.

This notion of "from the masses, to the masses" is central to the formulation of policy in China, and Five-Year Plans are an important example of China's whole-process people's democracy.

XINHUA

A cargo ship sails out of the Qingdao Pilot Free Trade Zone in Qingdao, Shandong Province, on November 5

Political continuity

The plenum stressed the importance of upholding and strengthening the leadership of the CPC, described by Xi as the fundamental guarantee for advancing Chinese modernization.

The plenum communique also emphasized that in pursuing economic and social development during the 15th Five-Year Plan period, the CPC must stay committed to Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought, Deng Xiaoping Theory, the Theory of Three Represents, and the Scientific Outlook on Development, and fully implement Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era.

When first embarking on its reform and opening-up drive in 1978, China's leaders made a strategic decision to prioritize economic development while adhering to the Four Cardinal Principles: upholding the socialist road, upholding the people's democratic dictatorship, upholding the leadership of the CPC and upholding Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought.

This dual focus has remained a defining feature of China's development model and goes a long way toward explaining its remarkable achievements. It is worthwhile comparing this strategy with the experience of the Soviet Union in the 1980s, where economic reform was accompanied by the dismantling of working class power and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union's leading role, culminating in the USSR's collapse.

In a turbulent and complex global environment, China continues to work toward socialist modernization, building common prosperity and an ecological civilization, while engaging with the world on the basis of mutual respect and mutual benefit. The 15th Five-Year Plan represents a comprehensive and forward-looking blueprint for achieving these goals. **BR**

The author is an independent political commentator and author of *The East Is Still Red: Chinese Socialism in the 21st Century (2023)*
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Global Governance at a Turning Point

By Djoomart Otorbaev

As the United Nations (UN) marked its 80th anniversary on October 24, the international system it helped establish in 1945 finds itself at a profound inflexion point. When the UN Charter first affirmed the organization's purpose "to maintain international peace and security," "to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights," "to promote social progress and better standards of life," and to "ensure justice and respect for the obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law," it did so in a radically different world—one defined by the aftermath of a global war and the promise of collective security. Today, the UN counts 193 members, compared with 51 at its founding and its mission has expanded to include development, humanitarian response and sustainability goals.

Yet the 1945-built architecture of global governance is increasingly misaligned with the realities of 2025—structural, geopolitical, and technological stress points are emerging across the system, and the eighty-year milestone offers not merely an opportunity for commemoration but also a moment for decision.

The UN's legacy remains considerable: peace-keeping missions, humanitarian response, a global development agenda under the Sustainable Development Goals and the "norm-platform" that multilateral diplomacy provides. But the system is also under strain, as it reflects the post-war order rather than today's multipolar reality.

This mismatch has been exposed in the ongoing paralysis over crises from Ukraine to Gaza. Meanwhile, the broader system faces legitimacy challenges: Many states in the Global South question a Western-centric order in which they feel under-represented, and emergent technological risks, such as AI and cyber-governance, are rapidly outpacing existing institutional frameworks. In short, the world has changed faster than the institutions that govern it.

In this context, the UN's 80th anniversary coincides with a growing push for reform—and even, for some, transformation. At the recent summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), held in Tianjin Municipality from August 31 to September 1, President Xi Jinping unveiled the Global Governance Initiative (GGI), which aims to reshape the global architecture.

The GGI is based on five guiding principles: sovereign equality, adherence to international rule of law, commitment to multilateralism, the people-centered approach and a focus on tangible action. President Xi stressed that "global governance has come to a new crossroads" and emphasized the UN's irreplaceable role while rejecting "double standards" imposed by a small number of countries.

Crucially, Russian President Vladimir Putin declared Russia's support for China's initiative, stating that Russia had "carefully listened" to the proposals and welcomed discussion to establish "a more effective and functional system of global governance." The significance is clear: Two of the UN Security Council permanent members have publicly aligned behind the same reform vision, which may signal a shift in the balance

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Representatives of more than 60 countries and international organizations attend a side event titled The International Organization for Mediation: A New Platform for Enhancing Global Governance under the Rule of Law, co-hosted by the Permanent Mission of China to the United Nations (UN) and the International Court of Mediation, at the UN Headquarters in New York on October 29

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UN Secretary General António Guterres (front) visits the global photo exhibition Shared Lives, Shared Future celebrating the 80th anniversary of the UN at the UN headquarters in New York on October 20

of governance norms.

The GGI has found resonance across the Global South, where states have long advocated for equitable representation, sovereignty and an agenda of development and dignity. China's framing of the initiative as supporting the UN's centrality, giving developing countries a greater voice and narrowing the North-South divide has been well received in many capitals. While the concrete uptake of the initiative remains nascent, the normative appeal is evident: The demand for fairness, equality and accountability in global governance aligns with long-standing Global South aspirations.

In this evolving landscape, the Central Asian states play a distinctive role as actors in a "multi-vector" foreign policy landscape: engaging with all major powers while aligning with none, and maintaining the remarkable posture of having no enemies anywhere in the world. These five countries—Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan—have built multiple "5 + 1" summit formats, including Central Asia plus China, Central Asia plus Russia, Central Asia plus the EU, Central Asia plus the U.S., Central Asia plus Japan, and Central Asia plus the Gulf Cooperation Council, that illustrate a flexible engagement model beyond ideological blocs. Their example suggests how an inclusive, non-zero-sum network of relationships might underpin a future governance architecture.

This interplay of initiatives points to three reform pathways. First, representation: expanding institutional voice to more countries. Second, agility: embracing flexible governance networks, regional-global linkages and thematic platforms rather than rigid hierarchies. Third, outcome-orientation: shifting from abstract declarations to measurable improvements in development, security and people's lives.

Yet risks abound. Reform rhetoric, however potent, may mask the pursuit of alternative spheres of influence. A China-led global governance initiative, even if formally inclusive, may be interpreted as substituting one dominance for another unless its mechanisms ensure broad participation. Institutional inertia, vested interests and geopolitical rivalry remain barriers. Moreover, normative alignment must be matched by resources, enforcement and accountability mechanisms—aspirations without delivery risk cynicism.

As the UN marks its 80th year, global governance stands at a turning point. The GGI, the broader Global South mobilization, and the example of Central Asia's diplomatic model all point toward a re-anchoring of global governance around equality, cooperation, and action. Whether this becomes an era of adaptation or transformation depends on whether the multilateral community treats this anniversary as more than symbolic. The challenge is not whether the UN survives, but whether it thrives in a world that looks very different from the one in 1945. The coming months and years will show whether the 80th birthday is merely a commemoration—or the opening of a new chapter in global governance. **BR**

The author is former prime minister of Kyrgyzstan, a distinguished professor of the Belt and Road School under Beijing Normal University and the author of *Central Asia's Economic Rebirth in the Shadow of the New Great Game*
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Sovereignty Through Technology

By Lan Xinzhen

Computing power, algorithms and data are the core factors for the digital economy. According to figures from the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, as of the end of June, China had built 10.85 million standard racks, and its intelligent computing power had reached 788 EFLOPS, an indicator of system speed equaling 1 quintillion floating-point calculations per second. China tops the global large language model count with 1,509 models having been released.

The central authorities now aim to ensure the country's digital development continues this rapid acceleration by making the supply of these factors more efficient. In its Recommendations for Formulating the 15th Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development, adopted at the Fourth Plenary Session of the 20th Communist Party of China Central Committee on October 23, the committee called for more efficient supply of computing power, algorithms and data. To act on these recommendations, China will increase its investment in these factors with the aim of making major breakthroughs over the coming five years.

Five-year plans are comprehensive blueprints for China's development, outlining goals, strategies and priorities for each five-year period. The 15th Five-Year Plan period runs from 2026 to 2030.

As humanity enters the Intelligent Age, with rapidly increasing demand for computing power, the supply of these three core factors will be essential for China to maintain

its competitive advantage in the development of AI. Maximizing efficiency will therefore be crucial for achieving China's goals of restructuring its national competitiveness and high-quality economic development.

Global competition in the technology sector has extended from trade to digital infrastructure and standard setting. China faces the persistent risk of being constrained by other countries in high-end AI chips and advanced processes. Increased domestic supply efficiency in the digital sector is therefore an important part of decreasing China's reliance on external production factors, limiting its exposure to risk and contributing to long-term technological independence.

Examples such as the U.S. using export controls on chips to limit China's technological development and Chinese-language content making up only 3 percent of the training corpus for GPT-4 demonstrate that digital development is not merely about catching up or competing, but is also about ensuring China's digital sovereignty and an equal platform in the world's digital future. While the U.S. export controls on AI chips and chipmaking equipment have slowed China's digital development in some areas, they have accelerated its development of domestically produced alternatives. China's ability to adapt to external pressures such as these will only be enhanced over the coming five years.

A deeper motivation lies in the fact that if China is unable to ensure independent supply of these three factors, it will always be trapped in the position as a rule taker, rather than having an equal seat at the table of global digital governance. Today's international AI governance rules, from model transparency to cross-border data flows, are essentially defined by the technical practices of international giants such as OpenAI and Google. Their technology paths have shaped what AI security and privacy protection are considered to be. China's efforts to ensure more efficient supply aim to use the world's largest application scenario, most complete industrial system and most complex governance challenges to formulate alternative solutions and standards for international consideration.

The efficient supply of computing power, algorithms and data is ultimately necessary to ensure China's 1.4 billion people will never be "unplugged" by external forces or strangled by ideology and power politics. It is not merely about technological independence, but also about ensuring China's digital security. **BR**

The efficient supply of computing power, algorithms and data is ultimately necessary to ensure China's 1.4 billion people will never be "unplugged" by external forces or strangled by ideology and power politics

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From Atrocity to Accountability

By Daniel Filmus

The publication of *Tokyo Trial: Evidence and Judgment of the Nanjing Massacre* by the Foreign Languages Press in September is very timely. It has particular relevance in today's global context, marked by increasing armed conflicts, growing tensions between countries and numerous situations of ethnic and religious persecution.

The Nanjing Massacre of winter 1937-38 committed by the Japanese invaders included the killing of more than 300,000 Chinese civilians and unarmed soldiers, the rape of tens of thousands of women, the torture of detainees and the looting and plundering of the population's material goods. Chinese society and its government have always honored the memory of the victims and demanded justice. However, in much of the West, this barbarity committed by the Japanese armed forces remains little known.

One of the aspects of the massacre that has not been sufficiently disseminated is the role played by the Tokyo Trial, particularly in achieving justice and punishing those politically and militarily responsible for the massacre, as well as those who failed to act to prevent it.

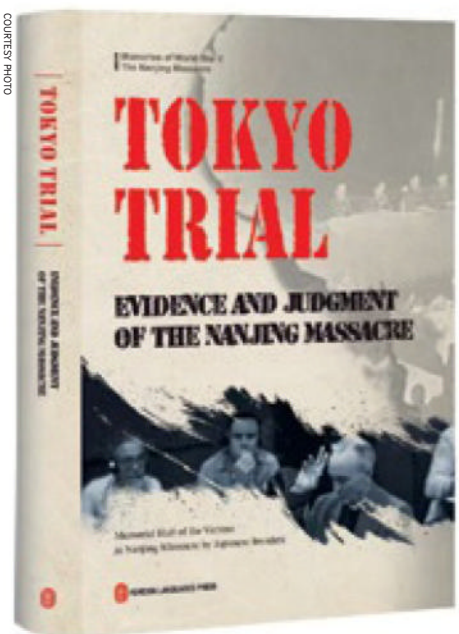
Reading the testimonies and reports presented in the book raises awareness of the dehumanizing way in which the Japanese military acted. The eyewitness accounts are particularly heartbreaking.

They enable the reader to approach the massacre not only as an observer, but also as someone who emotionally feels the victims' pain and shares the conviction that such testimonies must never be forgotten, but passed down from generation to generation, so that atrocities like those described are never repeated. This is equally true of all of the testimonies, including the accounts of the repeated sexual violence suffered by the women of Nanjing. As in other cases of genocide, in Nanjing, women became the main targets chosen by soldiers in their attacks on defenseless civilian populations.

One of the particular characteristics of the Nanjing Massacre was that the selection of victims by the Japanese soldiers was completely random. With few exceptions, there was no military reason for deciding whom to arrest or kill. No one was safe. This pattern of indiscriminate killings created an atmosphere of terror throughout the population, with the aim of paralyzing their ability to organize any form of response.

Unlike the Holocaust, it was not a bureaucratized genocide, precisely planned with state or military command structures. The book shows that, in this case, it was a chaotic massacre, a mass killing, encouraged—or at least tolerated—by the high command. This is why the testimonies and reports presented at the trial were so important in providing overwhelming evidence that allowed the guilty to be condemned. Those testimonies about their role in the Nanjing Massacre became a key reference and central evidence for the tribunal to establish the responsibility of military leaders such as Iwane Matsui and political officials like Koki Hirota—both sentenced to death—for the systematic atrocities committed over several weeks against the civilian population and prisoners of war.

COURTESY PHOTO



Tokyo Trial: Evidence and Judgment of the Nanjing Massacre

Undoubtedly, the book is a major contribution to preventing attempts to deny or downplay the massacre. At the same time, it is a tool to reclaim the humanity and dignity of the victims. By recounting the atrocities and cruelty inflicted on the civilian population, it preserves memory as an act of moral justice and prevents being forgotten from becoming a second death. At the same time, it restores the voices of those who were silenced by violence. If Nanjing shows us that barbarity is possible, then its memory must become an antidote against its repetition. **BR**

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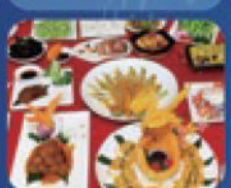

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Closer Ties Through Trade

China's vast market and increasing openness create opportunities for global partners By Wang Ruohan

At this year's China International Import Expo (CIIE), Michael Hart, President of the American Chamber of Commerce (AmCham) in China, was on a tight schedule. On November 6 alone, he visited more than 40 member companies at the expo including Dell, FedEx, GE Aerospace, Johnson & Johnson, Nike and Walmart.

The Eighth CIIE was held in Shanghai from November 5 to 10 and Hart told *Beijing Review* the event provided useful insights into the bilateral trade relationship. "The CIIE does actually help us understand how interconnected our economies are. It has been a great chance for American and other foreign companies to meet their clients in China," he said.

As the world's first national-level expo dedicated to imports, the CIIE has been held annually since 2018. Over the years, it has evolved into a key platform for China's high-level opening up and a global public good shared by all.

Market magnet

What is the most significant value for companies participating in the CIIE? Most companies gave *Beijing Review* answers similar to Hart's: to gain a better understanding of the Chinese market, to capture the latest consumer trends and to build closer partnerships with Chinese companies.

Why is the Chinese market so crucial for these companies? As the world's second largest economy and the second largest importer, China boasts a massive consumer market. In 2024, its total imports of goods reached 18.39 trillion yuan ($2.6 trillion), a year-on-year increase of 2.3 percent, reflecting the country's strong demand for foreign products.

At the Eighth CIIE, the value of intended deals reached rose 4.4 percent year on year to a record $83.49 billion, Wu Zhengping, Deputy Director of the CIIE Bureau, said at a news briefing on November 10.

Exporting to China is only the beginning—investing in China has become a preferred choice for many foreign enterprises.

Visitors choose plush toys at the booth of WarmPaca, a Peruvian alpaca wool brand, at the Eighth China International Import Expo (CIIE) in Shanghai on November 6

VCG

"In today's global economy, China has emerged as a vital stabilizer and growth engine, supported by its steadfast commitment to opening up, massive market scale, dynamic innovation ecosystem and complete industrial supply chains. Its consistent five-year plans offer businesses clear, continuous direction, reflecting a holistic, systematic approach to long-term industrial development," Ren Xinting, Managing Director of KraussMaffei China, told *Beijing Review*. KraussMaffei, founded in Germany in 1838, is one of the world's leading manufacturers of machines and systems for producing and processing plastics and rubber.

Five-year plans are comprehensive blueprints for China's economic and social advancement that outline the goals, strategies and priorities for each five-year period. Since 1953, the country has formulated and implemented 14 five-year plans and will put the 15th Five-Year Plan into action next year.

According to the Report on Foreign Investment in China 2025, published by the Ministry of Commerce, in 2024, foreign-invested industrial enterprises with annual revenue from principal business of at least 20 million yuan ($2.8 million) generated 26.8 trillion yuan ($3.8 trillion) in revenue and 1.8 trillion yuan ($253 billion) in total profit, with a revenue-to-profit ratio of 6.6 percent, 1.2 percentage points higher than the national average for enterprises of the same size.

With China accelerating industrial upgrading, expanding talent pools, increasing research and development (R&D) investment, and improving its innovation capacity, multinational companies are reevaluating China's strategic position in the global value chain. China has transformed from the "world's factory" into a "global innovation hub." Foreign enterprises no longer invest in China solely to serve the local market; they view China as a global R&D center, production base and innovation hub to support markets worldwide.

Otis, a leading U.S. manufacturer and maintainer of elevators and escalators, has its largest R&D center in Shanghai, "which really demonstrates the commitment and confidence that Otis has in the Chinese market," Sally Loh, President of Otis Greater China, told *Beijing Review*. This center drives innovation that caters not only to local needs but also serves global markets, Loh added, "as we do export our solutions to other countries as well."

Through the CIIE, foreign enterprises are integrating into China's high-quality development process at an unprecedented pace, sharing in China's openness and jointly creating a sustainable future.

Shared strength

China's continued openness has also enabled deeper economic cooperation with partners around the world—particularly those in the Americas. Through trade, investment, technology transfer and market access, China and countries in the Americas are leveraging their respective strengths to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes. The CIIE has emerged as a key platform for bridging these complementarities.

Bernardo Muñoz, Commercial Counselor at the Consulate General of Peru in Shanghai, highlighted the CIIE as "a major bridge connecting China with partners around the world," noting that cooperation between China and Latin America has increasingly become a win-win process. He pointed to China's investment in Peru's Chancay Port as a prime example of this complementarity.

Facing China across the Pacific Ocean, the Chancay Port officially began its operation on November 14, 2024. It is not only a major project under the China-proposed Belt and Road Initiative, which works to boost connectivity along and beyond the ancient Silk Road routes, but also the first smart and green port in South America. With a planned container handling capacity of 1 million twenty-foot equivalent units in the short term and 1.5 million in the long term, the port will establish Peru as a key Asia-Latin America land-sea gateway.

"It shortens transport time, reduces costs, and allows us to export agricultural products faster, with better quality and competitiveness," Muñoz told *Beijing Review*. The port cuts shipping time to Asian markets from 45 to 23 days, lowering logistics costs by over 20 percent, according to official statistics.

WEI YAO

Visitors explore the Colombia National Pavilion at the Eighth CIIE on November 6, tasting Colombian coffee. Colombia was a guest country of honor at the expo

He further emphasized that China's investment in advanced machinery and technology is helping to strengthen local industries, create jobs and increase incomes, forming a virtuous cycle that benefits both sides. "We have the raw materials and talent; China has technology, capital and global vision. Together, we can build a sustainable and prosperous future," Muñoz said.

Colombia was one of the six guest countries of honor at this year's CIIE, together with Thailand, the United Arab Emirates, Nigeria, Georgia and Sweden. Oscar Felipe Rueda Plata, Commercial Counselor at the Embassy of Colombia in China, told *Beijing Review* that the Colombian delegation consisted of 29 companies showcasing a diverse range of products—from coffee, chocolate and olive and avocado oils to handicrafts and pharmaceuticals. Beyond trade, Chinese firms are actively involved in infrastructure, energy, and tourism projects in Colombia. "These collaborations reflect the complementarity of the two economies. China provides technology, capital and infrastructure expertise, while Colombia offers natural resources, agricultural products and new markets," Rueda Plata said.

"At the end of the day, if you don't value China's business environment, growth, stability or institutions, you're not seeing what the world is today. China has continued to grow and accelerate over decades, and its strength is unmatched. Businesses and financial institutions here now have significant global influence. Understanding this also educates partners on how we can work together to meet both their needs and ours," Jack Perry, Chairman of the 48 Group Club and CEO of London Export Corp., told *Beijing Review*. The 48 Group Club is a London-based non-profit organization dedicated to promoting China-Britain trade cooperation.

As the world's two largest economies, China and the United States share an interest in stable trade. "Companies are the 'ballast' of the relationship," Hart said, citing a saying often used by AmCham. Politics and the economy may go up and down, but AmCham member companies continue to operate in China, work with their Chinese partners and produce locally. "You can really see our member companies as the most stable part of the relationship—they continue to be here and be committed to this market," he added. **BR**

(Reporting from Shanghai)

Copyedited by G.P. Wilson
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Innovation Takes Center Stage

New technologies become more visible and accessible at the CIIE By Ma Xiaowen

The annual China International Import Expo (CIIE) is no longer merely one of the world's largest trade fairs. Now in its eighth edition, the Shanghai event has cemented its status as the world's premier "First Show Stage"—a critical launchpad where global innovators debut their most disruptive technologies and visionary products.

Held from November 5 to 10, this year's CIIE hosted participants from 155 countries, regions and international organizations, including 290 *Fortune* 500 companies and industry-leading firms. With over 600 more exhibitors than last year, the total exhibition space and overall participation hit a new high. The value of intended deals exceeded $83.4 billion.

Hub for global firsts

Data from the CIIE Bureau, the organizer of the expo, showed a total of 461 products, technologies and services made their China debuts at this year's event, with over 200 of those also being global debuts. Notably, 170 overseas enterprises and 27 institutions have attended all eight editions of the CIIE, seeing the expo as an indispensable annual fixture for tapping the world's second largest consumer market.

At a news conference on November 11, Lin Jian, a spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, said the Chinese market is increasingly acting as a platform for the world to leverage open cooperation, reaping benefits and applying pioneering technological innovation. This ethos of collaboration permeated the six-day expo, linking global research and development (R&D) efforts across diverse sectors to China's vast, rapidly evolving consumer demands.

"There is no doubt that the size of the China market is always one of the most triggering ideas," Tino Zeiske, CEO of German retailer and wholesaler Metro Commerce Group, told *Beijing Review*.

Following 30 successful years of operation in China, Metro has now expanded its physical footprint beyond 63 cities. Zeiske detailed the company's strategic integration with Chinese partners like the e-commerce app Dmall to accelerate e-commerce, AI, and technical solutions, emphasizing a continuous adaptation of product lines based on rapid local consumer feedback.

The auto sector demonstrated radical localization. Jörg Buchheim, CEO of Webasto Group, a German manufacturer of automotive roof and thermal systems, said he views the CIIE as a crucial hub for connecting with clients and, most importantly, exploring next-generation innovations specifically for Chinese consumers.

Buchheim proudly introduced Webasto's innovative flexible car roof—a product developed in China and exhibited at this year's CIIE. Designed for variable opening configurations, it will debut in the Chinese market later this year before rolling out in the U.S. and Europe. He underlined that the company had launched three innovation centers in China to facilitate fast, open interaction with domestic automakers like Xiaomi, Geely and Li Auto.

Further pushing the boundaries of engineering, Michelin, the French tire and mobility technology company, presented a prototype of airless wheels for lunar rovers. This extreme-weather technology is designed to withstand temperatures ranging from 100 down to minus 240 degrees Celsius, ensuring stability on the moon's rugged terrain.

Materials and personal tech

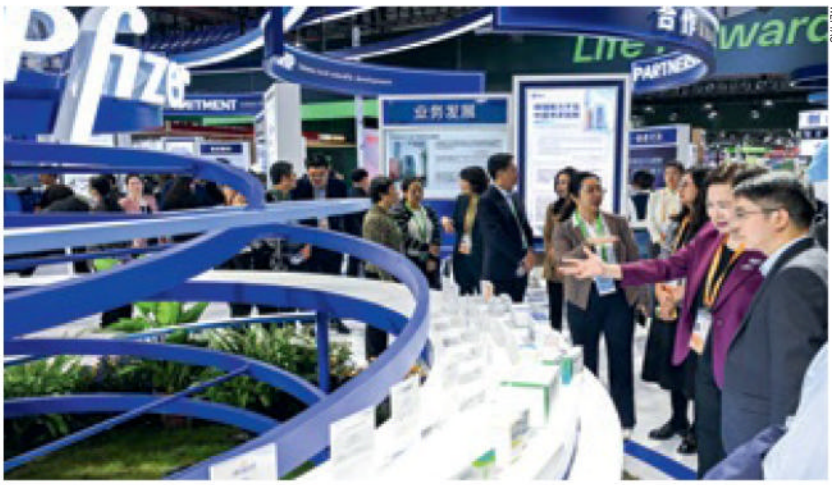
U.S. technology startup Shift Robotics chose this year's CIIE for the Asian debut of its intelligent powered shoes, which use a built-in AI algorithm to enable wearers to walk at running speeds, up to 11 km per hour.

"I didn't anticipate that so many people would be interested in trying it," said Xunjie Zhang, founder and CEO of Shift Robotics, noting the overwhelming response exceeded all expectations for their first foray into the Asian market. "Through the expo, we are also exploring connections with local distributors."

This year, the CIIE inaugurated a dedicated new materials area. This platform immediately attracted companies like Nippon Paint Holdings. Wee Siew Kim, Co-President of the Japanese paint, coatings and new materials group, said the high standards of the new section inspired their participation.

The company chose this year's CIIE for the global debut of the Nippon Paint Smart Road Marking Paint, which dramatically enhances night-time visibility, extending recognition distance by up to 160 meters and giving drivers up to 10 extra seconds of reaction time. The paint is also designed to be highly recognizable by autonomous vehicles, showcasing a future-forward approach.

Nippon Paint executives used the CIIE to affirm their strategic plans: increased investment and expanded R&D capabilities in China. They said the company views investing in China, with its powerful supply chain and research



WEI YAO

A representative at the booth of U.S. pharmaceutical multinational Pfizer highlights pharmaceutical innovations and major drug debuts at the Eighth China International Import Expo (CIIE) in Shanghai on November 5

WEI YAO

A visitor tries on AI-powered smart glasses at U.S. multinational semiconductor and telecommunications equipment company Qualcomm's booth at the Eighth CIIE on November 5

strength, as inherently investing in the future.

Shiya Amano, head of Japan External Trade Organization, a government-related organization that works to promote mutual trade and investment between Japan and the rest of the world, echoed this sentiment, confirming in a news briefing Japanese firms' willingness to collaborate with Chinese counterparts in robotics, AI and more.

For a healthy life

The 70,000-square-meter Medical Equipment and Healthcare Products Exhibition Area showcased many new medical innovations. Johnson & Johnson MedTech, the global medical technology and device company of U.S. healthcare giant Johnson & Johnson, introduced its ETHICON™ 4000, the world's first 3D stapling laparoscopic surgical stapler. It was the Asian debut of this breakthrough technology, which aims to reduce the risks of bleeding and leakage associated with traditional planar stapling.

The cutting-edge field of brain-computer interface (BCI) was spotlighted by German medical equipment and imaging technology company Siemens Healthineers. Their BCI solution includes core imaging devices that establish a "mesoscopic" level imaging platform, which take clear "middle-scale" brain pictures to support BCI surgeries. Two of these devices were previously instrumental in the U.S. neurotechnology company Neuralink's clinical trials, helping make invasive BCI surgery "visible, planable, and controllable."

Edwards Lifesciences, a U.S. company that produces heart valves, highlighted its local initiatives—faster product launches, clinical support, deeper partnerships—at the CIIE. Wayne Markowitz, Corporate Vice President for Asia Pacific, said the company regards CIIE as a platform to collaborate with experts to advance heart disease care and merge global innovation with local needs. Markowitz hailed the CIIE as "an important platform for global innovation to enter the Chinese market."

This localized innovation trend was crystallized by GE HealthCare China, the local subsidiary of the U.S. medical technology firm. As an attendee of all eight editions of the CIIE, the company presented nearly 40 innovative solutions, with a remarkable 60 percent primarily developed by the Chinese team—a new record for the concentration of local innovation. Song Weiqun, CEO of GE HealthCare China, said, "China is not only GE HealthCare's largest market outside of the United States, but also an important component of our innovation and advanced manufacturing layout."

The expo also featured significant advancements in oncology. AstraZeneca, a British multinational pharmaceutical company, exhibited two of its latest breast cancer drugs approved in China for the first time. Simultaneously, Abbott, the U.S. healthcare company specializing in diagnostics and nutrition, responded to the demand for precision medicine by showcasing multiple "China-debut" medical nutrition solutions and technologies like biosensors and smart diagnostics.

By setting a record for global product debuts and cementing billions in committed deals, the Eighth CIIE has solidified its role as a dynamic engine for technological advancement. For the world's leading innovators, the consistent message is clear: The Chinese market has become the definitive arena for scaling the future of global technology. **BR**

(Reporting from Shanghai)

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From Startups to Symbols

How "Six Little Dragons" became the face of China's intelligent future

By Zhang Shasha

Early this year, a new phrase began making waves across China's tech world: the "Six Little Dragons of Hangzhou." Each company in this group—UniTree Robotics, BrainCo, ManyCore Tech, DEEP Robotics, Game Science, and DeepSeek—is based in the capital city of the eastern Chinese province of Zhejiang and has made headlines with breakthroughs in AI, robotics and digital innovation.

Months after their rise to fame, the "Six Little Dragons" finally came together for their first-ever joint appearance at the World Internet Conference (WIC) Wuzhen Summit in Wuzhen, Zhejiang, on November 7.

In Chinese culture, there's a saying from an ancient poem: A mountain need not be high; it becomes sacred with the presence of an immortal; a river need not be deep; it comes alive with the presence of a dragon. This poetic imagery was perfectly embodied in Wuzhen, a water town where rivers and bridges weave through history, and the meeting of these "six dragons" gave that verse new meaning.

This year is the 10th anniversary of the vision to build a community with a shared future in cyberspace, proposed by Chinese President Xi Jinping at the Second WIC in Wuzhen. Fittingly, the conference's theme, Forging an Open, Cooperative, Secure and Inclusive Future of Digital Intelligence—Jointly Build a Community With a Shared Future in Cyberspace, brought together global guests and industry leaders from November 6 to 9, envisioning what the next era of digital intelligence might look like.

The Six Little Dragons Wuzhen Dialogue, held on November 7, was one of the most anticipated moments of the conference. Their stories of struggle, growth and vision offered a unique snapshot of China's AI sector, providing invaluable perspectives on how the industry has evolved and where it is headed.

The past

"In 2016, there were just three of us," Wang Xingxing, founder of quadruped and humanoid robot manufacturer UniTree Robotics, recalled. The following year, the startup brought their first robot dog to the WIC.

None of Wang's team could have imagined that, less than a decade later, the company would grow to have over 1,000 people, and that their robots would catch the attention of Marc Raibert, the founder of U.S. robotic manufacturer Boston Dynamics.

"I talked to Mr. Raibert at the end of 2024 and he kept bringing up UniTree. The depth of his understanding and respect for the company made me ashamed as a Hangzhou native that he knew it better than I did," Wang Jian, a member of the Chinese Academy of Engineering and founder of Alibaba Cloud, the cloud computing arm of Chinese e-commerce giant Alibaba Group, said.

At BrainCo, the story began in a Harvard lab. Ten years ago, its founding team was made up of students experimenting with what was then an obscure idea: brain-computer interface (BCI).

"A BCI could help a child who can't speak find their voice or help someone with chronic insomnia finally sleep," Han Bicheng, founder of the neurotechnology company. "We saw the potential to take century-old, bulky medical devices and reimagine them for the modern era, so that more people can benefit from the technology."

"Picture a group of Chinese students in a basement wearing glowing headgear at 2 a.m. One night we scared an old American lady who thought we were recharging our brains to get better grades," Han recalled.

According to Han, frustrated by slow research cycles in the U.S., they moved the company's headquarters to Hangzhou in 2018 and that marked a turning point for rapid growth.

COURTESY PHOTO

A participant of the World Internet Conference (WIC) Wuzhen Summit tries out a wheelchair controlled by a brain-computer interface device in Wuzhen, Zhejiang Province, on November 7

The Six Little Dragons Wuzhen Dialogue underway during the 2025 WIC Wuzhen Summit in Wuzhen on November 7

Huang Xiaohuang, co-founder of spatial intelligence infrastructure provider ManyCore Tech, used to work at chip giant Nvidia. "Back then, people in Silicon Valley didn't want to talk to you at social events if you were in hardware. So, I told myself I'd either join or start an Internet company," he recalled.

"Ironically, I sold my Nvidia stocks to do it," Huang joked. He said his company's story mirrors the Internet's evolution. The past decade of massive user growth fueled today's AI boom. The hardware and infrastructure that once seemed unfashionable are now at the heart of the new era.

In 2006, a bold prediction circulated in the robotics sector: By 2050, a team of fully autonomous humanoid robot soccer players could beat the human world champions. "I didn't want to wait until I was about 80 to see that happen," Zhu Qiuguo, founder of industrial-use quadruped robot manufacturer DEEP Robotics, said.

"By 2015, Boston Dynamics had already built robots that could run and leap outdoors. We asked ourselves, could Chinese robots do that too? That question has driven us ever since," Zhu added.

When DEEP Robotics first attended the 2050 Conference, a gathering in Hangzhou for young people from across the world to exchange academic insights and ideas, more than 10 years ago, their robot dog had to be suspended by two steel wires. "It sounds funny now, but at the time, our robot dog couldn't stand up on its own. We had to keep it hanging just to make it move smoothly," Zhu explained.

Meanwhile, video game company Game Science, the studio behind the globally popular action game *Black Myth: Wukong*, has been reflecting on a decade of transformation in China's entertainment industry.

In 2016, for the first time, users of simplified Chinese games on Steam, the world's largest PC gaming platform, matched users of English-language games, about 32 to 33 percent each. Around the same time, the number of moviegoers in China surpassed that in North America.

"Those data points said everything: The user base for Chinese content had reached a critical mass," founder of Game Science Feng Ji said, adding that it was also in 2016 that he and his partners made a big decision to write a business plan and seek their first round of funding.

The present

Over the years, BCI technology has evolved from abstract laboratory experiments into innovations that can truly transform everyday life. At the Fourth Asian Para Games in Hangzhou in 2023, swimming champion Xu Jialing, born without hands, used a neuro-controlled prosthetic arm developed ▸▸

by BrainCo to ignite the games' cauldron.

"Our technological roadmap follows a principle we call 'from pain to possibility'," Han said. "We start by helping those who need these innovations the most—people who have lost their arms or legs, or children unable to speak because of autism."

For the past eight to nine years, Han and his team spent almost every day alongside these people. As their research deepens, they are expected to expand into broader fields. "Our hope is that one day, these technologies won't just restore lost abilities, but will become tools that every person can use to enhance life itself," Han said. In the next two years, the company plans to launch products focused on sleep and weight management, according to him.

Encouragingly, BCI was listed among the six technologies of the future in the document of recommendations for formulating China's 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-30), adopted at the Fourth Plenary Session of the 20th Communist Party of China Central Committee in October, which further enhanced Han's confidence.

At this year's WIC Wuzhen Summit, ManyCore Tech unveiled a platform that builds realistic virtual factories for robots. Before entering physical production lines, robots can be trained and tested in this digital environment, ensuring that once they step into real factories, they can operate safely, efficiently and with precision.

"We began as an Internet startup, and today we've evolved into a spatial intelligence company serving not just humans, but also robots," Huang said. "Our journey reflected the shift from the Internet era to the AI era."

In the age of AI, while many companies are focused on large language models, ManyCore Tech is betting on large spatial models. "In the future, each person may be served by as many as 10 robots. In that world, robots will populate not only our homes but also our workplaces and factories. To coordinate and manage these vast networks of intelligent machines, advanced spatial intelligence will be essential," Huang added.

DEEP Robotics' once-wire-suspended robot has now turned into the world's first weatherproof robot capable of truly operating outdoors, one that can stand up to wind, rain and immersion. Its products are being deployed in industries such as power inspection and emergency response.

Once dismissed as a pastime for the idle, gaming was long seen as something frivolous and unproductive in China. "*Black Myth: Wukong* proved that gaming is not just entertainment. It's the ninth art, a fusion of the eight traditional arts, literature, painting, music and more, with the most advanced technologies of our time," Feng added.

Victor Chen is a senior researcher at DeepSeek, an AI development company

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A view of Wuzhen, host of the WIC Wuzhen Summit, captured on November 5

founded in 2023. He credits the company's rapid growth over the past two years to its focus on long-term vision and commitment to open-source principles. "Open-source technology, along with the collaboration and sharing it fosters, has become one of our company's core strengths," Chen said.

Wang agreed with Chen on the importance of open-source technology. A year ago, humanoid robots that could simply walk well was considered impressive. "But in recent months, we've seen robots that can dance, perform and move with remarkable agility," Wang said.

He explained that China's manufacturing capabilities allow Unitree to independently develop key robotic components and create more affordable robot products. These products are sold to leading laboratories, universities and tech companies around the world. They are building software, applications and open-source AI algorithms together on the products, which has accelerated progress of the robotics industry in recent years.

AI is driving embodied intelligence at unprecedented speed. What once belonged to science fiction is already becoming reality, and in the next few years, that transformation will only quicken, he predicted.

The future

While AI is advancing at breakneck speed, challenges still abound. Wang said while large language models benefit from the vast pool of Internet data, robots still lack a similar scale of usable data.

"When it comes to embodied intelligence, everything from model design and data collection to training methods and reinforcement learning is still in the experimental stage," Wang said.

Zhu summarized the robotics industry's core challenges as twofold: embodied movement and embodied complexity. The first involves enabling robots to move autonomously from one place to another without prior knowledge of their environment. The second lies in replicating the dexterity of the human hand, a goal that remains without a clear technical path.

"As AI advances, we must keep asking—who is it ultimately serving?" Feng said. "If progress only concentrates technological power in the hands of a few companies or individuals, AI becomes a risk, not a blessing. The real goal should be to empower ordinary people."

Chen agreed that today's AI still falls short of human consistency, being brilliant at solving complex problems, yet oddly unreliable on simple ones. The reason, he explained, is that current AI systems cannot continuously evolve in the real world after training the way humans can. "But give it 10 or 20 years, these limitations will be overcome," Chen said. "I'm an optimist about technology."

"But I'm a social pessimist," he added. In previous technological revolutions, human intelligence remained the core driver, old jobs disappeared, new ones emerged, and society as a whole became more productive. But this time, intelligent machines may become smarter than people. Jobs could vanish, yet new ones may not appear. Humanity might be liberated from labor, but that liberation could shake the foundations of social order.

Could humanity simply pause technological progress? Chen doesn't think so. "As long as companies seek profit and advancement, the wheel of history will keep turning. To generate higher returns, AI will inevitably be used to replace human labor," he said.

Chen said in the short term, the opportunities are greater than the risks. The next three to five years will be a honeymoon period between humans and AI, in which the technology still depends on people to function, amplifying human productivity rather than replacing it. During this stage, he believes tech companies should act as "evangelists," promoting accessibility and ensuring AI benefits everyone.

In the medium term, five to 10 years from now, AI may begin replacing certain types of human work. At that time, tech companies should act as advisors, helping society understand which roles are at risk, he said.

Challenges will become more severe in the long term. "In 10 to 20 years, AI could take over most jobs in the market. When that happens, human society will need to redefine its order. Technology companies must become guardians of humanity, protecting people's safety and helping rebuild the social framework."

Their remarks sparked wide reflection among global attendees. Balthasar Staehelin, personal envoy of the president to China and head of the Regional Delegation for East Asia at the International Committee of the Red Cross, told *Beijing Review* that technology will reshape societies, the challenge now is how to use it responsibly for the common good.

Nii Narku Quaynor, known as the father of the Internet in Africa and Chairman of Ghana Dot Com Ltd., stressed that the true purpose of technology is to improve lives and bridge divides. "We should first use it to close gaps—and then also share the unique knowledge and expertise of the Global South with the world," he told *Beijing Review*.

Former Belgian Ambassador to China Patrick Nijs echoed the same concern on AI governance. "We need a sustainable framework for AI governance to ensure that these technologies serve humanity, rather than humanity serving the technologies," he told *Beijing Review*.

"Right now, there's a dangerous competition between blocs striving to dominate these technologies. That approach won't work. With 8 billion people sharing one planet, we must collaborate and share. This, I believe, is at the heart of China's commitment to global cooperation," he added. **BR**

(Reporting from Wuzhen, Zhejiang Province)

Copyedited by G.P. Wilson
Comments to zhangshsh@cicgamericas.com

A Frontier Without Borders

A tropical city's growing magnetism for travelers By Tao Zihui

Among China's coastal cities, Sanya in the southern Chinese island province of Hainan is relatively young. It was established in 1987, riding the very wave of the country's reform and opening up. In less than four decades, it has transformed from a fishing town to a premier tourist destination and pivotal trade port.

By the end of September, the number of foreign nationals entering and exiting through Hainan's ports had reached 980,000, a surge of 46.3 percent year on year, surpassing pre-pandemic 2019 levels. As of early November, Sanya Phoenix International Airport had handled 795,000 passenger arrivals, a 60-percent year-on-year increase. Among these travelers, 83 percent are foreign nationals, with 93 percent of them entering visa-free—both metrics ranking among the highest for air hubs nationwide.

Currently, passengers from 86 countries can enter Hainan visa-free, making the island province one of China's most accessible destinations for international travelers.

Duty-free pulse

At 10 a.m., sunlight pours into the Sanya International Duty-Free Complex, dappling the floors through its colossal glass walls. Within the sleek, yacht-inspired structure, the morning beat of commerce is already palpable.

In the sorting and distribution warehouse of the complex's logistics department, supervisor Tang Shuaishuai's eyes are fixed on real-time data flickering across his computer screen as duty-free goods purchased in the complex are placed on flights to the purchaser's destination. "Our intelligent sorting system can automatically identify the urgency level of each order, ensuring delivery to the aircraft before the customer's flight departs," he told *Beijing Review*. His walkie-talkie intermittently crackled with confirmation messages from various pick-up points.

Pointing to a recently updated data entry, he noted, "See here, this customer's flight was rescheduled, but the system has already automatically re-routed the delivery. If a traveler updates their information at least six hours ahead, the system will rearrange the delivery route for on-time arrival of the goods." This seemingly minor convenience is underpinned by the intricate and precise operation of an entire logistics ecosystem.

Furthermore, the methods for collecting duty-free goods have become increasingly diversified. In addition to the standard airport and port pickup, a range of more convenient options have been introduced, including home delivery. The mail delivery service, now covering the entire nation, effectively addresses the common consumer dilemma of wanting to buy more than one can carry.

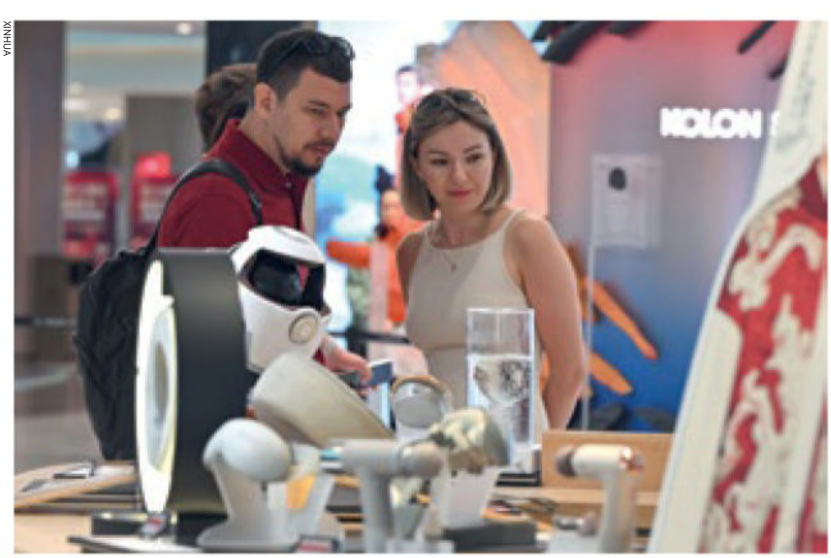
The realization of the benefits offered by the offshore duty-free policy, which allows visitors to make tax-free purchases at designated stores, is inextricably linked to highly efficient and stringent customs oversight. A departure from the old model, today's regulatory framework is defined by smart, unobtrusive oversight.

"From the moment goods arrive in Hainan and enter bonded warehouses, information including brands, specifications, and quantities is reported to and enters the monitoring process of the customs authorities," Tang elaborated. Within the customs surveillance zone, data for every duty-free item is synchronized in real-time with the customs platform at every stage: warehousing, exit from the warehouse, sale, and final collection.

Strolling through the vast complex, one observes an intriguing phenomenon: Alongside the familiar international luxury brands, the counters of Chinese brands like Huawei, Florasis, and Caremore also draw substantial crowds.

"We introduced these premium domestic products to the duty-free complex both to meet the interest of international tourists in Chinese goods and to bolster the confidence of domestic consumers in homegrown brands through direct comparison," Feng Chonghan, Deputy General Manager of the Sanya International Duty-Free Shopping Complex, told *Beijing Review*.

This strategy is yielding positive results. On October 1, the inaugural themed exhibition of Dimoo



International customers select merchandise at the Sanya International Duty-Free Shopping Complex in Sanya, Hainan Province, on November 9

MENG SHUNXUN

An immigration officer at the Phoenix Border Inspection Station processes entry procedures for a passenger at Sanya Phoenix International Airport in Sanya on September 27

dolls, with Dimoo being a popular character created by designer toy company Pop Mart, was held at the complex, featuring an immersive experience that fused trendy art with local culture and attracting a large number of young consumers. Through such innovative models, a growing number of distinctive *guochao* (China-chic) brands are leveraging this platform to reach a global audience.

Feng revealed that the complex plans to continuously increase the proportion of domestic brands, aiming to upgrade from a platform primarily for introducing international goods to a hub facilitating flows of goods in both directions.

In another part of the city, the Sanya FLY3 Cross-Border Experience City is dedicated to assembling a diverse array of goods from international markets. As the permanent home of the China International Consumer Products Expo (CICPE), a premier national-level trade fair. The venue hosts over 10 national pavilions and has become a year-round marketplace, facilitating over 10,000 cross-border transactions since its opening in July.

With products from countries participating in the China-proposed Belt and Road Initiative, which works to boost connectivity along and beyond the ancient Silk Road routes, now enjoying a year-round presence, Sanya solidifies its role as an established hub for premium international products, moving beyond temporary exhibitions to sustained commerce.

Invisible convenience

In the international departure hall of Sanya Phoenix International Airport, as passengers push their luggage carts through security checkpoints, few are aware they are participating in a quiet revolution in regulatory procedures.

By the end of 2024, the airport had streamlined its entry process into a single, unified inspection. Under this model, a single baggage scan is reviewed simultaneously by both security and customs officers on separate screens, a collaborative screening that has reduced clearance times to under 60 seconds.

"As soon as luggage is placed on the conveyor belt, CT scan images are simultaneously transmitted to the customs backend. Passengers don't need to have their bags scanned a second time, achieving a seamless clearance experience," explained Gao Shiying, Chief of the Passenger Inspection Section at Sanya Airport Customs, a unit of Haikou Customs.

This efficiency is driven by the ongoing refinement of intelligent passenger inspection systems, which leverage advanced imaging and AI analysis to balance precise oversight with seamless passenger flow.

Immigration facilities have also been upgraded. In July, to support the 240-hour visa-free transit policy, dedicated lanes were introduced that combine permit issuance with entry checks. Currently, travelers from 55 eligible countries who meet certain criteria can enter China through any of 65 designated ports in 24 provincial-level regions and stay in the country for up to 240 hours, or 10 days, without a visa before heading to a third destination.

"This enables transit passengers to arrive, complete procedures and depart with minimal delay," said Wang Jian, deputy station head of the Phoenix Border Inspection Station under the Haikou Exit-Entry Frontier Inspection Corps. Official statistics show that from the start of the year until the end of September, the port visa office at the airport had processed over 12,000 applications, a year-on-year increase of 15 percent.

Notably, promotional videos detailing the visa-free entry process, dubbed in Russian, play on loop on the large screens at the entry of the airport. Since the start of this year, Sanya has received more than 167,000 Russian visitors, a remarkable 177-percent increase compared to the previous year. In response, the airport's border inspection station has deployed Russian-speaking staff, multilingual translators, smart form-filling kiosks and high-definition guidance screens, ensuring a seamless air-to-ground passenger flow.

A free trade port (FTP) system focusing on trade and investment liberalization and facilitation will be "basically established" in Hainan by 2025 and become "more mature" by 2035, according to a master plan released by China's central authorities in 2020. It further states that the island province will become a globally influential high-level FTP by the middle of the century.

Bolstered by the policies on Hainan's FTP development, Sanya has launched 38 international and regional air routes. This captivating tropical coastal city is embracing global travelers with ever-greater efficiency, security and openness. **BR**

(Reporting from Sanya, Hainan Province)

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Comments to taozihui@cicgamericas.com

Skills Over Degrees

University graduates embrace vocational training for brighter job prospect

By Ji Jing

Wang Xiao (a pseudonym) remembers the scene vividly when he enrolled at Taiyuan Wantong Vocational Skills School in Taiyuan, Shanxi Province, this May. Stepping onto the campus, he was greeted not with the sprawling green lawns and grand, imposing teaching buildings commonly seen in universities, but rather with a cluster of highly specialized training facilities, hi-tech equipment and the operational hum of machinery. Though initially daunted by the fast-paced instruction, Wang felt a surge of excitement. "Finally, I can get my hands on real equipment," he told *China Newsweek* magazine.

Having graduated with a bachelor's degree in environmental engineering from a university in Shanxi last year, Wang opted against a career in his field. He instead set his sights on the electrical automation industry, drawn by its broader career opportunities.

"Electrical automation is quite popular and offers broader employment prospects. I'm eager to solve real-life problems with my own hands and make a living through technology," he said. Discovering online that vocational schools are a viable path for career change, he enrolled in an intensive eight-month program.

Wang's decision reflects a broader societal shift. With more and more people participating in higher education in China, "diploma inflation" is increasingly evident. Statistics from the Ministry of Education show a record 12.22 million students graduated from university in 2025, diluting the advantage of holding a bachelor's degree. Simultaneously, high-end manufacturing faces a shortage of skilled workers. While companies urgently seek practical problem-solvers, many bachelor's graduates lack hands-on experience, leading to the predicament of "wanting a job but not having the skills."

Xu Ling, Vice President of Guangdong Polytechnic Normal University, told *CPPCC Daily*, a newspaper affiliated with the country's top political advisory body—the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) National Committee—that moving from a bachelor's to a vocational qualification is not a downgrade, but a capability upgrade. She explained that as industries evolve and technology advances, the job market demands more skilled, versatile professionals. She views young people actively acquiring technical skills as a rational "reskilling."

Opportunities and challenges

The growing challenge of securing employment is one of the main factors driving this trend. Lin Beilei (a pseudonym), for instance, graduated with a bachelor's degree in human resource management from a private college in a small city in 2023. Unable to find a job in her city, she enrolled in a two-year mining electromechanical engineering program at a local vocational school. "After I graduate from vocational school, I will be able to find a job with a state-owned enterprise," Lin told *China Newsweek*, highlighting the direct career path vocational training offers.

Beyond the necessity of finding employment, some bachelor's degree holders with prior work experience are pursuing vocational training to enhance their skills. An Mengyi, who studied communications at university, explained to *Workers' Daily* newspaper that after two years in the workforce, she identified a gap between her academic learning and her job requirements, and her income was not ideal. Consequently, she chose to study high-speed train

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Huang Xueyan (front right), a teacher in the culinary program at the Hainan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture Vocational and Technical School in Qinghai Province, guides students in a baking class on December 17, 2024

XINHUA

A student majoring in clock and precision manufacturing at Tianjin Modern Vocational Technology College in Tianjin Municipality adjusts equipment at a practice center at the college on November 12, 2024

maintenance Technology at Zhengzhou Railway Vocational and Technical College, a program known for its high demand in the job market.

However, the decision to reskill is not without its challenges, as multiple students shared with *China Newsweek*. Wang, for instance, revealed a dual internal struggle: "For me, there's the issue of pride. My classmates are either pursuing master's degrees or looking for jobs. If I go to vocational school, people will say I wasted my bachelor's degree," he said. "Additionally, there's the risk. What if I spend time and money and still can't find a job?"

This sentiment highlights the societal pressures and personal anxieties associated with diverging from traditional post-graduate pathways.

Lin echoed this hesitation, "At first, I wasn't willing to accept it either. But after all, pride can't put food on the table."

The transition from university to technical college also requires students to adapt to a curriculum heavily focused on hands-on practical training. Mastering these practical skills demands time and a different learning approach. Han Yan, a university graduate now studying mechatronics at Qingdao Technicians College, shared his progress with *Workers' Daily*: After just half a year, he can operate a lathe and perform fundamental tasks like cutting and drilling.

Reconsidering education

The phenomenon of college graduates enrolling in vocational schools has gained strong policy support recently. From June to August this year, Guangdong, Zhejiang and Shandong provinces have introduced policies supporting vocational colleges to offer programs for university students. For instance, the Human Resources and Social Security Department of Guangdong Province proposes setting up a one-year technician program for those with a bachelor's or master's degree.

The influx of students also poses higher demands on vocational colleges. Xu said that vocational colleges should accelerate their transformation and upgrading. "Facing these students with higher academic backgrounds, clear learning objectives and strong practical needs, vocational colleges need to make adjustments in curriculum design, teaching models and faculty structure," she said.

Qingdao Technicians College has launched joint training programs with several well-known enterprises. They jointly develop training plans guided by job competencies and create courses based on real work scenarios.

"This deep integration ensures seamless alignment between learning content and actual enterprise needs," Zhang Qiusheng, Party Secretary of Qingdao Technicians College, told *CPPCC Daily*. Graduates from the school's vocational program for university students are mainly employed by renowned enterprises such as Shandong Port Group Co. Ltd. and Qingdao Metro. Their employment rate exceeds 98 percent, their salaries are generally higher than the average for fresh graduates, and they quickly grow into backbone forces within their companies.

The bright employment prospects lead to a pertinent question: Should bachelor's degree holders, who achieve better employment prospects through vocational reskilling, have chosen vocational education directly after high school? Wang said: "Knowledge is the foundation, and skills are the tools. Tools without a foundation cannot take you far."

Kuang Ying, a professor specializing in vocational education research at the Institute of Vocational and Adult Education at East China Normal University, said that this provides an opportunity for reconsideration. "For many people, the ultimate goal of education is to find an ideal job. Vocational education, with its continuously improving integration between industry and education, can provide a sense of employment security." **BR**

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Demon Diaries

Rewriting *Journey to the West* from the margins

By Peng Jiawei

Few Chinese heroic tales have captured the global imagination quite like *Journey to the West*. The 16th-century novel, which follows the pilgrimage of a Buddhist monk and his three disciples—the invincible Monkey King (Wukong), the slow-witted Pigsy and the ever-loyal fish spirit Sandy—has been adapted and reimagined endlessly across stage, page and screen. Its modern legacy stretches from the namesake 1986 television series, still China's most-rerun drama, and *Dragon Ball*, the Japanese manga that re-cast Wukong as a spiky-haired alien hero, to Hong Kong filmmaker Stephen Chow's cult fantasy comedy *A Chinese Odyssey* and *Black Myth: Wukong*, one of the biggest gaming phenomena of 2024.

The epic's latest cinematic reinterpretation, *Nobody*, however, derails from this heroic lineage by turning the story on its head. Instead of tracking the fabled four on their noble quest for the sacred scrolls, this Chinese animated film produced by Shanghai Animation Film Studio (SAFS) follows a ragtag group of demons who pose as the legendary quartet by embarking on their own journey to the West.

At the helm is a pig demon, a minor sidekick in the service of one of the many monster kings eager to devour the monk. When a workplace mishap earns him a death sentence, he devises a wild escape: to disguise himself as Pigsy and set off on a mock pilgrimage together with a toad demon disguised as the monk, a gorilla demon playing Wukong and a weasel demon enlisted as Sandy.

Produced on a relatively modest budget estimated at no more than 65 million yuan ($9.2 million), the film nevertheless became one of the summer's biggest breakout hits. According to Chinese ticketing platform Maoyan, as of November 11, it had taken in more than 1.7 billion yuan ($240 million) since its release on August 2, which makes it the highest-grossing 2D animation in Chinese box-office history.

And its story doesn't end there. Starting in November, the film began its global rollout, premiering in Australia, New Zealand and Malaysia on November 6 and in North America on November 7.

While its overseas journey has only just begun, *Nobody* has already proved that underdogs can rewrite familiar myths, that even a small story drawn from the margins of a tale as old as *Journey to the West* can stake out fresh territory in today's creative landscape.

Off the beaten path

For Yu Shui, the film's director, *Nobody* is less an adaptation than an extension—an attempt to explore the untold life of the countless dark creatures who flit through the original tale's shadows without ever being named.

"In the original novel, these demons were lumped together as *xiaodemen*—the little ones—figures brushed aside as irrelevant," Yu told *Southern Weekend*, a Chinese newsweekly. "But I've always wondered: Do they have families, frustrations and workplace anxieties? It's precisely their stories we wanted to tell."

This shift of focus from heroes to underdogs has struck a chord with Chinese viewers, who see echoes of their own everyday struggles in the film's motley collection of misfits and have-nots.

As one viral hashtag put it: "There's a little pig demon in every one of us." To many, the pig demon is that kid who leaves his or her rural hometown for the big city, only to find that hard work alone does not guarantee reward—yet who still chooses to stay hopeful; the toad demon speaks to the wave of young people flocking to government jobs, drawn by the promise of lifetime job security; the gorilla demon is every introvert forced to become extrovert simply because it is expected; and the once-chatty weasel, who trains himself into silence to play the stoic Sandy, embodies the young workers who slowly lose their spark as office life grinds them down.

COURTESY PHOTO

One scene that has sparked particularly intense debate comes at the end, where the four antiheroes, having exhausted all their cultivated powers to protect a village from a tyrannical demon king, revert to their original animal forms.

Some see a tragic ending, one where the little demons' efforts change nothing in the grand scheme. "The world, it seems, remains one where glory is reserved for the chosen few," a comment on review platform Douban lamented.

Yet others spot a quiet triumph. "The film presents a different kind of heroism, which is not about becoming somebody, but about choosing to stick it out despite realizing you may always be a nobody," another Douban comment read.

The director offers a similar interpretation. "You may think you've escaped one mountain, only to find yourself facing a bigger one," Yu said. "The film doesn't promise a full escape. It simply celebrates the act of trying."

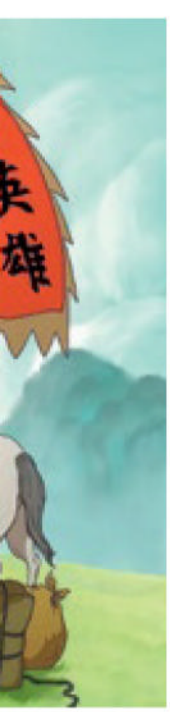
Lost and found

Beyond its resonance with today's young strivers, *Nobody* also taps into another sentiment: a nostalgia for a lost golden age of Chinese animation—one where SAFS ruled supreme. On Chinese social media, users have rallied under the trending slogan, "SAFS is back," trading recollections of how the studio's hand-drawn classics profoundly shaped their childhood and adolescence.

Founded in 1957, the studio was once internationally renowned for pioneering the Chinese school of animation, an artistic style that fuses Chinese aesthetics, techniques and cultural materials to forge a distinctly Chinese identity in animated film-making.

For several decades, the studio succeeded in fulfilling that mission. In the early 1960s, it saw the release of *Havoc in Heaven,* China's first feature-length animated film in color, adapted from the opening chapters of *Journey to the West*. With a new visual vocabulary that blends Peking opera, Tang Dynasty (618-907) art and folk traditions, it went on to win numerous international awards and is widely credited with putting Chinese animation on the global map.

Around the same time, the studio developed what became its signature style, which blends classical ink painting with modern animation. This tradition began with *Little Tadpoles Looking for Mama* (1960), the world's first ink-painting animated film, and culminated in the 1980s with the release of *Feeling From Mountain and Water* (1988), which is considered both the crowning jewel of the genre and its swan song.



A scene from *Nobody* showing the four protagonists disguised as the famous quartet from the 16th century novel *Journey to the West*

The decline of the genre ran parallel to the gradual waning of SAFS in the 1980s and 1990s, when television became a household staple and flooded audiences with Hollywood imports like *Mickey Mouse* and *The Smurfs*, alongside Japanese anime such as *Sailor Moon* and *Slam Dunk*. SAFS's hand-drawn films, by contrast, were too costly to keep up.

By the time *Monkey King: Hero Is Back* (2015) and *Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child* (2019) ushered in a new era of commercially successful animated features in China, SAFS had become largely irrelevant to the Chinese film scene.

Nobody, however, shows a way out. The film was built on the first episode of *Yao-China Folktales,* an eight-part web series co-produced by SAFS and Bilibili, China's YouTube equivalent, which has amassed more than 350 million views on the platform since its 2023 release.

While retaining the web series' hallmark formula of using fantasy to tell stories with everyday resonance, the film also carries forward its effort to revive the studio's long-lost ink-painting animation tradition. Over four years, more than 600 artists created a visual style that merges the coloring techniques of traditional ink painting with Western art's emphasis on depth and realism.

This artistic choice is both a tribute to the golden era of Chinese animation and a testament to the enduring influence it holds over a new tribe of young Chinese filmmakers.

"We were raised on SAFS films," recalled Chen Liaoyu, the film's producer, who was among the first batch of Chinese undergraduates to study animation at the Beijing Film Academy in the 1990s. Many from that cohort would go on to become the mainstays of today's creative industry. "The imprint of that bygone age runs deep in everything we create," Chen said.

Yet tradition is not the only force shaping this generation, whose early exposure to foreign animated films has attuned them to a more commercially minded approach to animation.

For years, the Chinese film industry has been criticized for relying too heavily on box-office revenue, whereas many of Disney's successful brands derive a large share of their income from franchise licensing. *Nobody* charted a different path from its domestic predecessors. From the outset, a dedicated team of franchise incubators were involved to help shape the script and design the characters. To date, the film has partnered with more than 30 brands to launch over 400 licensed products, which has generated nearly 250 million yuan ($35 million) in merchandise sales.

A few months ago, the studio announced that a sequel will be released next summer. Whether *Nobody* can truly grow into an enduring franchise is yet to be seen, but in keeping with the film's core message, what ultimately matters is not whether one reaches its destination, but the act of trying itself. **BR**

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SPRING BUD PROJECT

TOGETHER LET'S HELP LITTLE FLOWERS BLOSSOM

Global Marketplace

Two highlights of the Eighth China International Import Expo, held in Shanghai from November 5 to 10, were the introduction of a dedicated zone for products from the least developed countries and the expansion of the zone for African products. The former offered free exhibition spaces, while the latter allowed many new African products to enter China for the first time. Initiatives such as these are part of China's plan to ensure South-South cooperation permeates all aspects of its international relations and trade. **BR**

(Text and photos by Wei Yao)

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Comments to weiyao@cicgamericas.com

1. Visitors sample tea produced in Laos at the Eighth China International Import Expo

2. Visitors browse wooden handicrafts from Zambia

3. Exhibitors from El Salvador pose in traditional costume in front of the country's booth

4. An exhibitor from Cuba sells the country's specialty products via livestreaming

Have We Reached the End of the Supermarket Age?

LI SHIHONG

A wave of supermarket closures has swept across China in recent years, with community grocery stores and large chains equally affected. One much-discussed example is Yonghui Superstores. According to the China Chain Store and Franchise Association, Yonghui Superstores ranked fourth in sales among Chinese supermarkets last year, but the company's 2025 mid-year report reveals it closed 277 loss-making outlets in the first half of this year. Many pundits are now examining the cause of these closures and conjecturing on their inevitability.

Yang Yeying (*Dazhong Daily*): The notion of "supermarket" has existed in Chinese households for only roughly four decades and now the once-booming Supermarket Age appears to be in decline. Two main factors account for this shift: First, lease expirations. Most brick-and-mortar supermarkets operate on 20 to 25-year leases, and many of those leases have been expiring since 2020. This has inevitably increased the number of store closures. Second, e-commerce growth and changing consumer habits. The rise of online shopping and shifts in buying behavior have led to a noticeable drop in foot traffic for traditional supermarkets.

Despite declining market shares, the experiential aspect of a physical store is still valued by most consumers—social interaction, impulse discovery and a tangible environment in which to unwind. In this sense, traditional supermarkets that can capitalize on these emotional and lifestyle dimensions may transform the perceived threat of closure into a strategic opportunity.

Unlike the emotionally oriented traditional supermarkets, membership warehouse stores and new-style retail enterprises are distinguishing themselves in the offline retail space with more thoughtful services and differentiated products. Behind each novel format lies a handful of bestselling exclusive items—the true source of their competitive advantage. Today, younger consumers increasingly seek personalized, high-quality products, which point out a future direction for physical stores.

Traditional supermarkets once played an irreplaceable role in meeting consumers' everyday needs. The rise of digitalization and smart technology should not be a force that squeezes them out; rather, it should be used as an opportunity to rethink their operation models. As long as the demand for wandering the aisles remains, physical stores will continue to exist.

Deng Hao (Ce.cn): Pang Dong Lai, which operates stores in Xuchang and Xinxiang in Henan Province, has been a standout in the Chinese retail market in recent years. They are even becoming local tourist attractions. Customers' most frequent praise for the chain is that it has good merchandise and excellent service, and is kind to its employees. Yonghui Superstores launched its own "Pang Dong Lai-style" reform in 2024 and several other supermarket giants are also piloting new models, including by adjusting product assortments to bring in higher-quality at more reasonable prices and raising employee wages and benefits to boost staff motivation and engagement. Many of these outlets experienced a surge in business immediately after reopening.

The success of a company hinges on multiple factors, and for traditional supermarkets the key is to learn and apply new ideas in an innovative "fit-for-local" way that meets consumers' needs.

Qin Mengting (*Changjiang Daily*): New services continually emerge in the market to meet evolving demand. It doesn't matter which ones rise and which decline—consumers care about only which offers the most affordable and convenient service. However, the essence of retail has never changed; it has always been a response to human needs. Don't hastily doom physical supermarkets. As long as they understand what consumers need, they can carve out a niche in the competitive market. **BR**

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